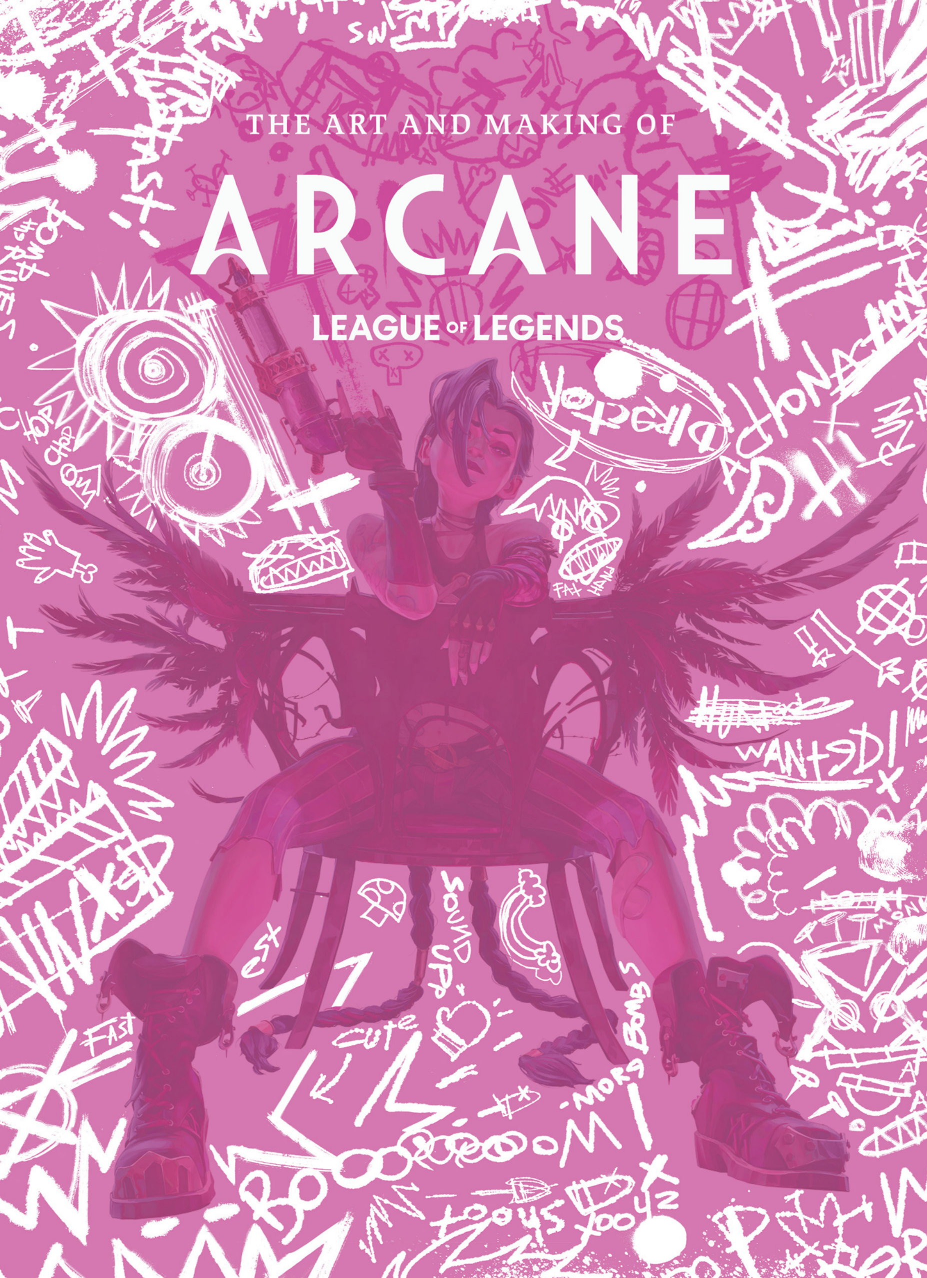
THE ART AND MAKING OF

ARCANE

LEAGUE OF LEGENDS


yo! DIRECTOR
WANTED!
FAT HAND
SOUND UP
BOMBS
-MORE
CUTE
FAST
BOOOOOOOOM!

BORING
DUMB
CUT!!
CHAMP??
LIAR
WATCH OUT
SMILE
CHOMP
PUNCH
ONE NAIL
WANTED!
FAST
CUTE
SOUND UP
MORE BOMBS
BOOOOOOM
DUCK!
FASTER
SIS

THE Art and MAKING OF
ARCANE
JINXED!
I AM STILL HERE

WANNA KNOW A SECRET?

Arcane S1 Ep 101 “WELCOME TO THE PLAYGROUND” 07-05-2021

PITCH BLACK.

The voice of a child SINGS a lullaby. It’s serene. Solitary.

YOUNG POWDER

Dear friend across the river,
My hands are cold and bare
Dear friend across the river,
I’ll take what you can spare

I ask of you a penny,
My fortune it will be
I ask you without envy

We raise no mighty towers,
Our homes are built of stone
So come across the river
And find (singing fades away)

FADE IN:

EXT. PILTOVER HARBOR BRIDGE — MAGIC HOUR

We open on THICK FOG hanging over a wide harbor bridge, billowing like clouds. ASH FLAKES float in the wind. In the distance, a towering skyline of technological wonder.

Our POV trudges through the smoke.

IN SLOW MOTION:

A SILHOUETTE breaks through the haze and RUNS past us, fleeing from something we do not see.

After a moment, a SECOND FIGURE appears through the fog. Stumbling backwards. Barely more than rough shapes.

BOOM! A MUZZLE BLAST RIPS through the smoke to the THUNDER of a gun. The thick haze shrouds the violence. The figure — a woman in shabby clothes — COLLAPSES. Smoke SWALLOWS her body.

Another silhouette follows the gun through the fog. A PILTOVER ENFORCER. He AIMS his rifle where the body fell and PULLS the trigger again. BANG! The enforcer makes eye contact with us. He DESPISES us.

Undeterred and oddly left alone, we move DEEPER into the haze.

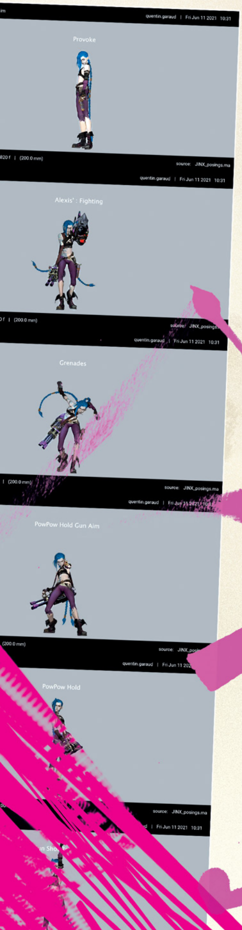
The Art & Making of Arcane

Created by
Riot Games & Fortiche Studios

S.1 11/06/21
S.2 11/09/24

ACTION
C'est parti

INT. FORTICHE — DIRECTOR'S ROOM — CONTINUOUS



FORTICHE
RIOT GAMES
INSIGHT EDITIONS
MELCHER MEDIA

WRITTEN BY
ELISABETH VINCENTELLI

END EPISODE

~~POWDER~~
JINX

ARCANE S1 EP 109 "THE MONSTER YOU CREATED" 07-22-2021

INT. SILCO'S WAREHOUSE — LOWER FLOOR — NIGHT

A SIZZLING NOISE fades in over pitch black...

Vi slowly wakes, dazed. She tries to blink the haziness out of her eyes. Her gauntlets are gone. She looks down at the chair she's sitting in. She tries to focus her vision:

The blue SPARKTORCH burns right in front of her face. It's blindingly bright. She looks around ——

Nothing. Darkness.

A MUSIC BOX starts playing Powder's lullaby. Vi STARTS. But she cannot move. She's TIED to the chair.

The sound slows, like a wind-up toy on its last revolutions, causing the lullaby to distort into an eerie, dull whine.

JINX (O.S.) ← Start

Really thought I buried this place,
but I shoulda known better.

VI

Powder?

Jinx sits on a railing high above Vi and watches her. Jinx's eyes are hidden in shadow. Throughout this conversation, her state of mind is hard to read.

JINX

Nothing ever stays dead.

Vi peers around in the darkness, nervous.

VI

Are we alone?

JINX

For now.
(hopeful)
Maybe forever.

Vi isn't sure what to make of that.

JINX

Wanna know a secret?

(beAt)

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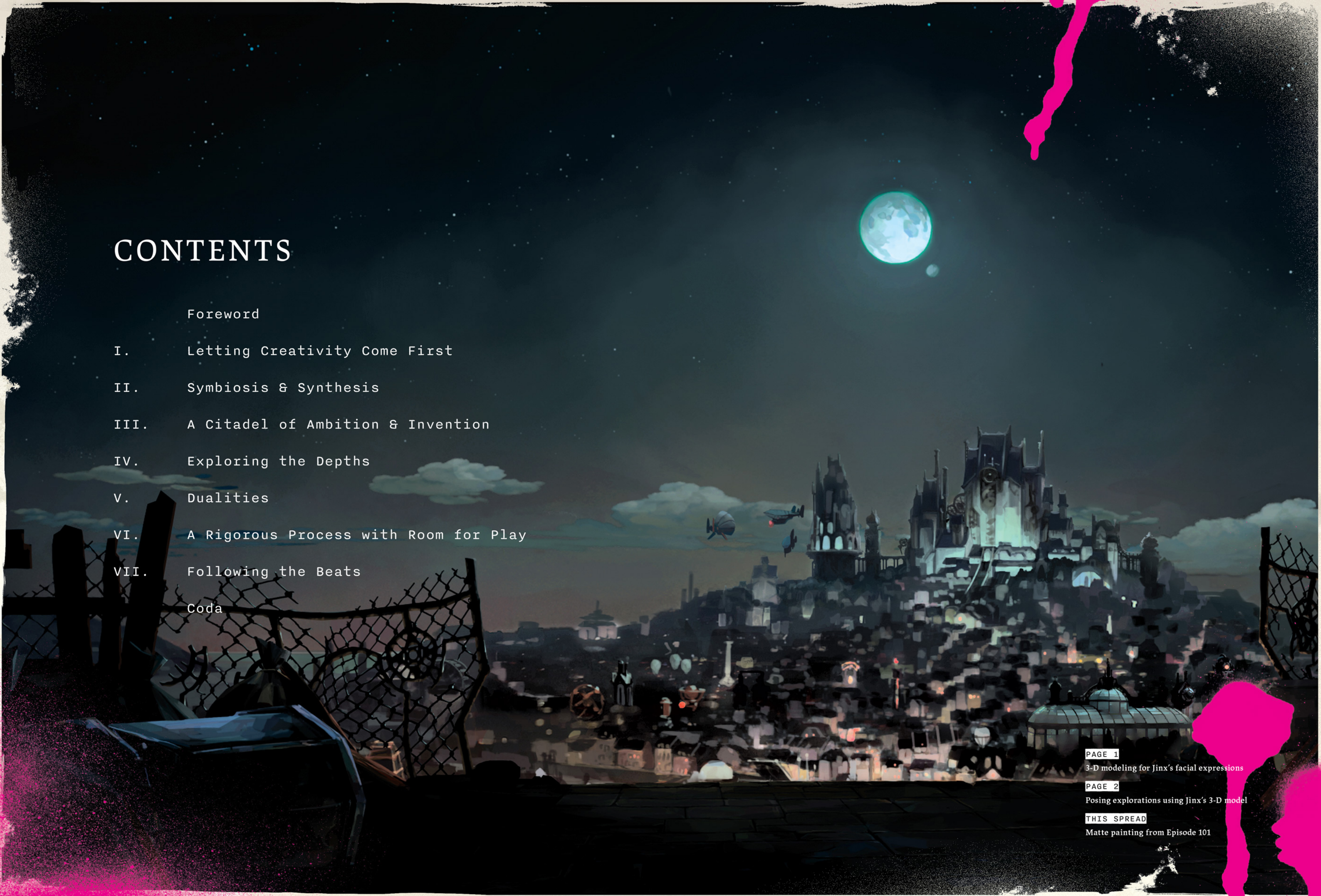

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3-D modeling for Jinx's facial expressions

PAGE 2
Posing explorations using Jinx's 3-D model

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Matte painting from Episode 101

HMM... FORWORD?? FOREWARD?

FOREWORD

FOREWORD

ARCANE WAS OUR FIRST FORAY INTO THE LARGER world of narrative entertainment, and as such, bringing it to the bigger screen was as exciting as it was daunting. Can our characters and world make the leap? Can a video game backdrop become a real place? Can our champions hold their own against the fantasy genre behemoths we love so much?

Whenever these questions arose, we always came back to what we loved about fantasy and video games in the first place: the sheer escape. When you grow up in a place that makes you feel like you will never be able to go somewhere wondrous and beautiful and exciting, fantasy can provide you with a wonderful alternative. Games like *Dark Age of Camelot*, *Warcraft*, *StarCraft*, *Everquest*, and *Quake* sparked our love for the fantastical, dark, and mysterious worlds of video games. We found inspiration in the tales of adventure told by authors like Naomi Novik, Trudi Canavan, Brandon Sanderson, Licia Troisi, Patrick Rothfuss, Joe Abercrombie, and J.R.R. Tolkien. If these and many, many more forays into human imagination could bring us joy and escapism, then maybe the ideas we had knocking around in our heads could too.

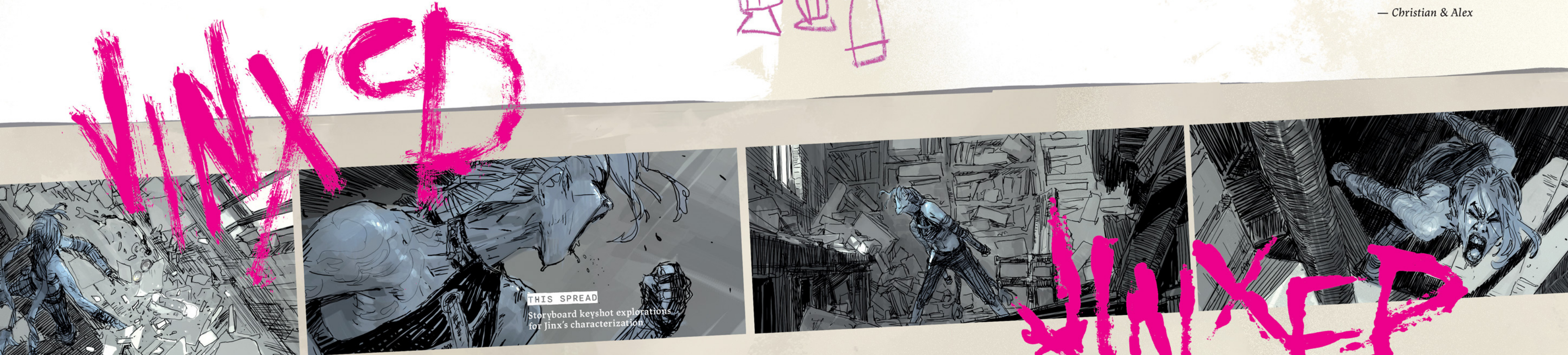
When *League of Legends* became part of our lives, we liked that the characters were very different from the typical fantasy game. The fingerprint of the creatives behind the game was palpable. People had fun working on these characters, it was so obvious. In *League of Legends*, we view our characters from a distant, top-down angle. We had never even seen our characters talk. The first acting test that we did with Fortiche proved to us that, yes, seeing Vi close-up, expressing her frustration about a botched heist in Piltover, was actually really fricking cool. The longer we've been creatives, the more we've learned that you take bets on people, more so than on projects. We wouldn't have been able to transport ourselves and others into the world of *Arcane*, *League of Legends*, or any other without believing in and relying on the people around us. The art of storytelling has always been a collaborative one, and *Arcane* is a prime example of how that collaboration can bring out the best in all of us.

The plethora of wildly talented artists at Fortiche and Riot Games rose to the challenge and crafted not only wonderful characters and worlds, but their focus on detail reached deep into the crevices of the show's look, giving the same attention to detail to even the simplest background prop. Specifically, Pascal Charrue, Jérôme Combe, Arnaud Delord, Arnaud-Loris Baudry, Bart Maunoury, and Julien Georgel deserve special mention. Their visual leadership was the driving force behind *Arcane*'s unique aesthetic. Through them, we learned that it wasn't enough to choose camera angles that provide clarity. The camera can make statements, can misdirect, can contextualize, can confuse, can question, can underscore, can overexaggerate, can undermine, can ignore. This challenged us to embrace the unconventional and permit the camera the same escapism we sought ourselves.

Arcane is a story about two sisters and two cities, but it is also so much more than that. It's about human experiences. All of us are messy, imperfect, and the amalgamation of our experiences: some good, and some downright awful. We wanted our characters and our story to reflect all of this, and feel like real people with dreams, insecurities, struggles, and ambitions. Even if our real world doesn't have mages or mechanical gauntlet brawlers, we would hope that Mel, Vi, or any of the rest of the cast might be similar to someone you've met and empathized with. All of us have the potential to be our best and worst selves by our own devices. The world around us is a kaleidoscope of complexity, and we tried to distill that as best we could into *Arcane*. There's no easy way through anything, as all of our characters can attest to. But what connects them all together is that they all took a stance. They all had the resolve to try and change their world, for good or ill. They evolve, and we all went through our own evolution alongside them.

As you go through this book, we, as well as all of the incredible talent at Fortiche and Riot Games, hope you join us on this journey of evolution. You'd be surprised to see how much it takes to get an animated series off the ground, let alone actually make it. There's thought and personality put into every part of the show at every level, and we hope to highlight as much of that as we can. And maybe, when you are worried about your ideas not working or if your vision is too much, you too can look on *Arcane* and know that you can bring your dreams to life too.

— Christian & Alex



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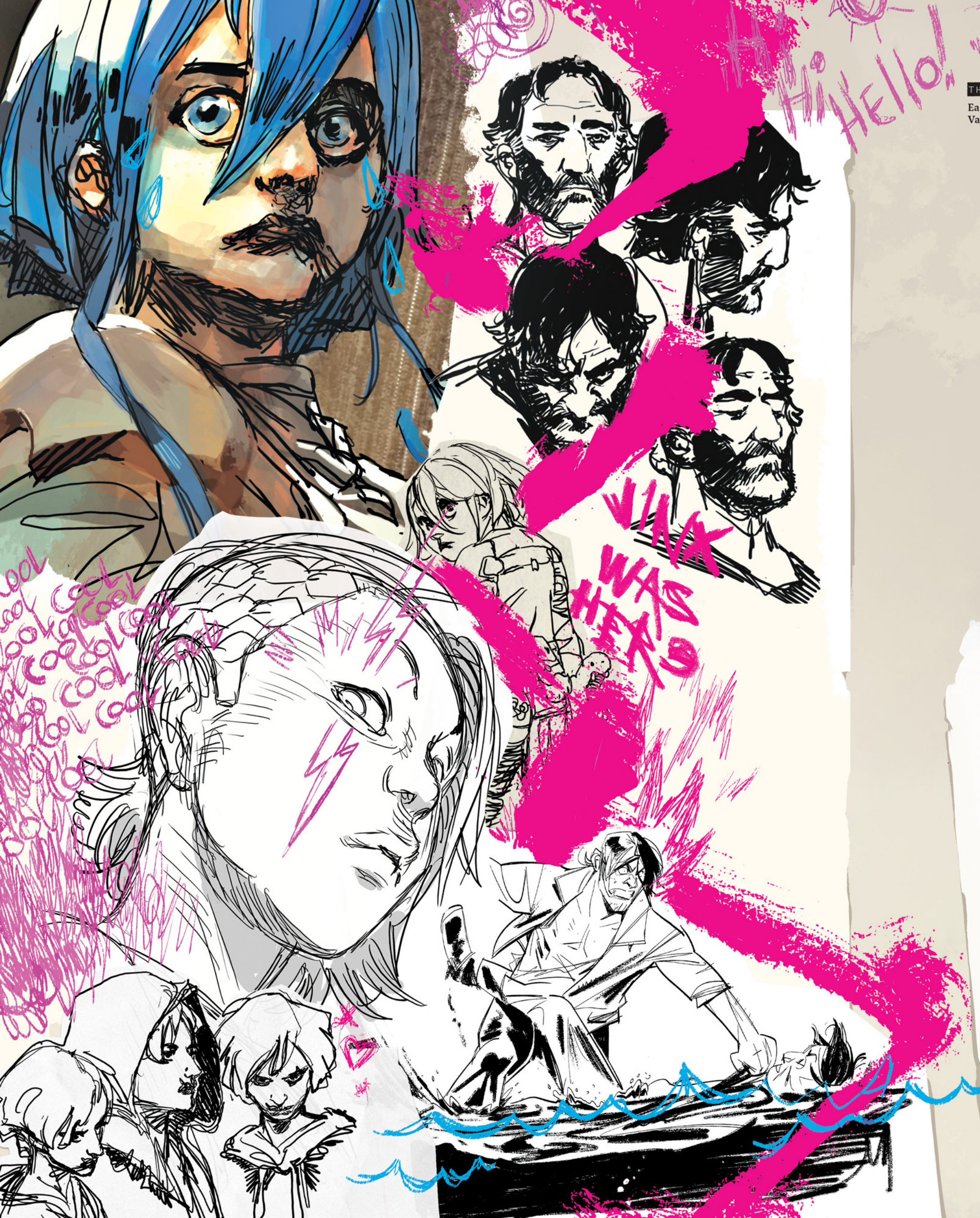
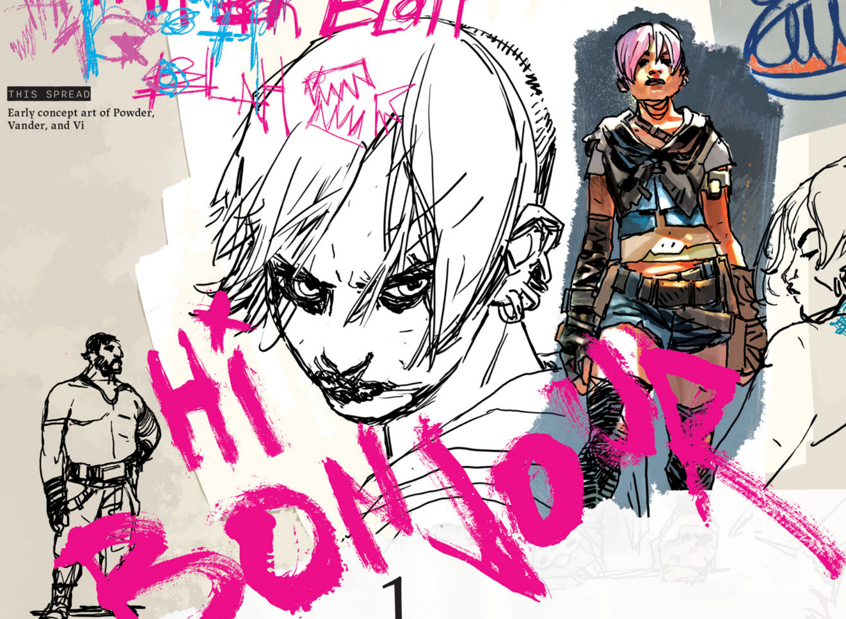
Storyboard keyshot explorations for Jinx's characterization.





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Early concept art of Powder, Vander, and Vi

1

LETTING CREATIVITY COME FIRST

IMAGINE ANOTHER WORLD THAT IS A LITTLE BIT fantasy and a little bit steampunk, and yet not quite either. Imagine a place where it's hard to tell what is magic and what is technology. Now, get a little closer: Here are two cities intertwined in a double helix of creation and annihilation, inextricably at odds but also interdependent and not all that different from each other. Above is the resplendent, inventive Piltover, looking ever skyward in its dedication to science and progress. Below is the scrappy, rebellious Zaun, finding inspiration and community in its outsider status.

How this world functions, how the people of these cities love, fight, and dream forms the heart of the animated series *Arcane*, which is based on the juggernaut PC game *League of Legends*. Getting it off the ground was a yearslong odyssey, and the secret to the show's success was an American-French team that embraced a wildly ambitious dream, then proceeded to figure out how to make it a reality. *Arcane* ended up being the triumph we know and love because its creators never forgot their guiding principle: Creativity and artistry always come first.

When the show debuted on Netflix in November 2021, it was obvious that Riot Games and Fortiche Production had a worldwide smash on their hands: *Arcane* reached the Netflix Top 10 in a whopping eighty-nine countries. In an incredible display of unity, fans and critics declared it an artistic victory—that first season hit a rare one hundred percent rating from critics on the reviews aggregator Rotten Tomatoes, while the average audience score was ninety-six percent. *Arcane* would go on to receive numerous industry accolades, and it became the first streaming show to win the Emmy for Best Animated Program.

Three years later, lightning struck again when Season 2 was released in the late fall of 2024, bringing a number of epic stories to a close—with even more complex emotions, gut-wrenching battles, and characters willingly meeting their destinies.

With the benefit of hindsight, it would be easy to take the show's success for granted. "Well, duh," a peanut gallery might say, "*Arcane* is based on one of the most popular video games of all time, and a dominating presence in esports—of course it was going to be huge."

Yeah, whatever

THIS PAGE
Christian Linke and Alex Yee with Riot's founders Marc Merrill and Brandon Beck at the Emmy Awards

But "of course" did not come up very often during the making of *Arcane*. Rather, the show's lineage has been marked by leap-of-faith decisions made by a disparate group of people who, according to conventional Hollywood wisdom, would not normally cross artistic paths or complement each other so well.

Then again, following a well-trodden path does not foster creativity—a lesson that is one of the key takeaways in the complex story of *Arcane*.

On paper, the show looked like the kind of head-scratching assignment professors might give film and business students: "Create a big-budget TV series inspired by a narrative-light multiplayer online battle arena game. And here are some constraints, to make it even more challenging: To come up with those hours of original content, your team must start with a couple of young employees at the game's parent company who have worked their way up from customer service and have no experience in longform storytelling, working in tandem with a French animation studio well known for ads and music videos, but not television series."

Arcane succeeded because imagination, flexibility, innovation, tenacity, and creativity were always in its DNA, going all the way back to the birth and ethos of *League of Legends* and its vivid universe—which the show is integrated into, creating a sprawling multimedia lore.

In 2009, two University of Southern California students, Brandon Beck and Marc Merrill, and their young company released a game based on the concept of teams of champions trying to conquer each other's base. In a bold move for a fledgling gaming studio, Beck and Merrill's company, Riot Games, released *League of Legends* as one of the very first free-to-play games. They also refused to monetize access to power, thus keeping the battlefield even and preventing players from relying on pay-to-win strategies.

"At Riot we had a disruptive layer to everything that we did," said Alex Yee, who is the co-creator and co-showrunner of *Arcane* with Christian Linke. "The game itself was very different at the time and had the same amount of doubt around a lot of decisions for it. Free-to-play as a concept for games in the West at the time was madness. I don't think there were any AAA titles that were using that model. The way we handled esports was also similar: That was never really done as much in-house as it was done at Riot. Also, the ambition that we've had for a lot of the things was not to do anything like what's already out there."

Yee and Linke's partnership at Riot goes way back. In the late 2000s, Linke had embarked on a promising career playing in a "somewhat successful" band, as he put it, in his native Germany. When he sensed he was hitting a creative and professional wall, Linke relocated to the United States to reboot his music career. Unfortunately, things did not significantly pick up; in need of a job, he answered a Craigslist ad for a customer-support position at an upstart game company in West Los Angeles—and his interview was with Yee, who ended up hiring him. "Maybe a year after that, I discovered he was actually a fairly legitimate European rock star right before he came to work with us," Yee said, laughing.

Riot was still fairly small at that point, and Linke and Yee segued to new duties. Yee had always been interested in *League of Legends*'s ever-extending lore so he stepped into that department in 2010, working on elements relating to story and narrative, as well as with the voice-over division. Linke had followed his inclination and skills toward the music department. By 2012, he had built up a formidable team there, helping to put together scores and songs for cinematics, spin-off albums and in-game music, and events like the annual *League of Legends* World Championships—a major esport event pitting teams from around the world against each other.

Linke also was scouring the web for potential partners with whom to work on short-form music projects, because he wanted to give some of the champions room to roam beyond the game's constraints. One day, he stumbled upon an animated video for "La Gaviota," an instrumental song by a French band called Limousine. "I had made it on a tiny budget, we had no money," said the video's director, Jérôme Combe. "It was a bit of a side project for us, something we did for friends."

The action in the video seemed simple, and yet it cast a languid spell. A young woman goes home, smokes a cigarette, takes a swig from a bottle, sinks into an armchair, starts taking off her clothes. She is unselfconscious and seems to be alone, but she also often looks at the camera, as if silently interacting with—teasing, maybe—the unseen person making the film.

On the surface, this is not the kind of material that feels like a good selling card for an action-packed game, but Linke was immediately taken by the atmospheric mood, worldly casualness, and sophisticated lighting. He saw that the short had been made by a Paris-based animation studio called Fortiche, and he reached out to ask if they might want to do something with Riot.

In 2012, Fortiche was just three years old and very small, essentially boiling down to its founders—Combe and his associates Pascal Charrue and Arnaud Delord—and a few employees. "It was a group of people working together rather than a proper company, at least in our minds," said Hervé Dupont, Fortiche's managing director. "There were twelve of us, working on ads and clips."

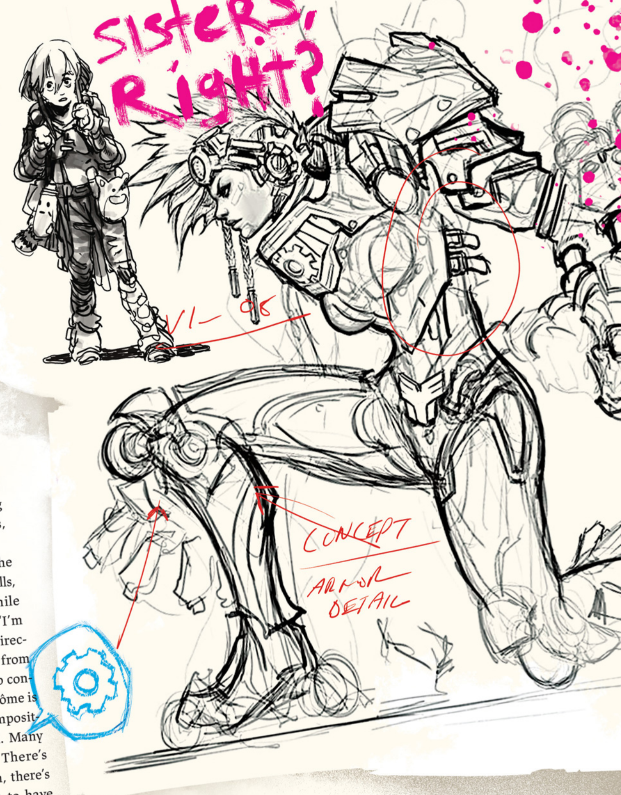
With such a small team, Fortiche divided up responsibilities among skills, taste, and personal affinities, while keeping them fluid and reactive. "I'm more into preproduction, artistic direction," Charrue said. "Arnaud comes from live-action videos and is really into conceptualization and editing, and Jérôme is into finalizing the project and compositing. Everything is linked, though. Many companies compartmentalize: There's preproduction, there's animation, there's execution. Fortiche's strength is to have three partners who know each other well, share the same tastes, and work well together. Part of creating Fortiche was being able to oversee the entire chain."

As Riot and Fortiche got to know each other, the initial discrepancies of scale, style, and sensibilities were almost comical. "There were twenty people [from Riot] in a room, and there we were with our little webcam," Delord said, referring to an early video meeting. "They asked if we knew their game and we said no. But Christian didn't care whether we were familiar with the game or not: He just wanted to do something artistic."

That "something artistic" turned out to be "Get Jinxed," about the colorful *League of Legends* champion Jinx. While not technically part of *Arcane*, that music video from 2013 marked a key stage in the development of the show: It was the first exploration of Jinx's personality and the first time Fortiche put its distinctive stamp on the *League of Legends* universe.

Right away, it was obvious that "Get Jinxed" belonged: It was different from previous *League of Legends* material yet complemented and expanded upon the game's artistic horizons.

Eventually, Yee and Linke decided to get a little more ambitious—make that a lot more ambitious. "You'd only get these three-minute explorations of characters or their stories, and you'd never really sink your teeth into them fully," Linke said of the videos and teasers he was making. "We were both wondering 'How can we finally get to



ABOVE
Early concept art of Powder and Vi

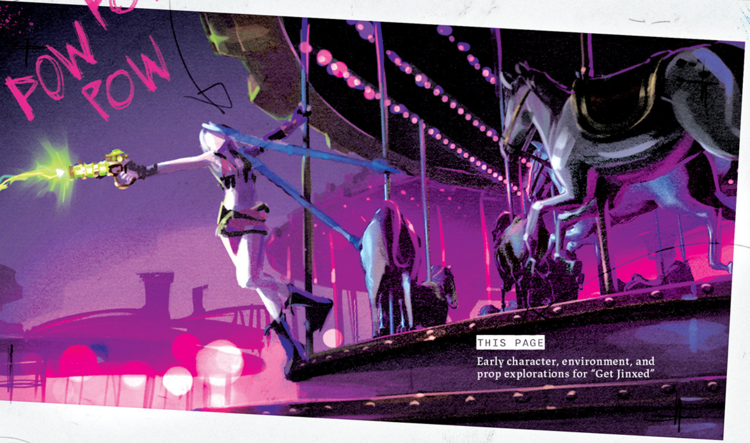
BELOW
Arcane creators Alex Yee and Christian Linke

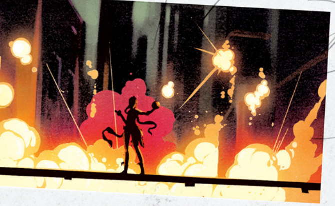
the champions' story? What do they do when they're not fighting? Where do they sleep? What do they eat? Who are their friends? Who are they as characters?'"

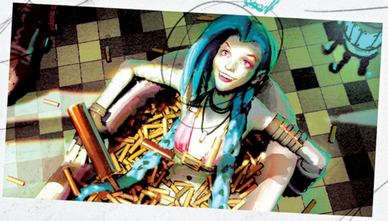
"We were lucky because everyone in the company was fatigued by the cinematics that we were making, which were big fight videos," Yee said. "Everyone was like, 'We want to see something that is grounded, something that has a story, something that's meaningful.'"

It also felt important—remember, both Yee and Linke's early Riot jobs involved directly handling players' queries and concerns—to reward *League of Legends* fans. "If you put in more time, if you put in more thought, if you drive for something that is deeper, it's giving something else to players," Yee said. "So it was a big agenda item for us going in to say, 'How are we going to counterbalance all this flashiness that we know about the characters with something that's going to make you lean into the show?'"

In 2015, the pair brought up the idea of making an animated series with Fortiche to the Riot leadership. The response was not as enthusiastic as they'd hoped, largely because neither Linke nor Yee had any experience in TV and Fortiche had never tackled anything that long.







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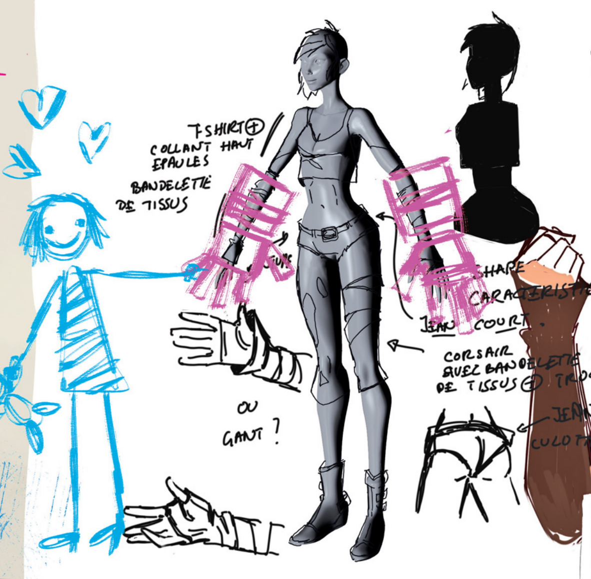
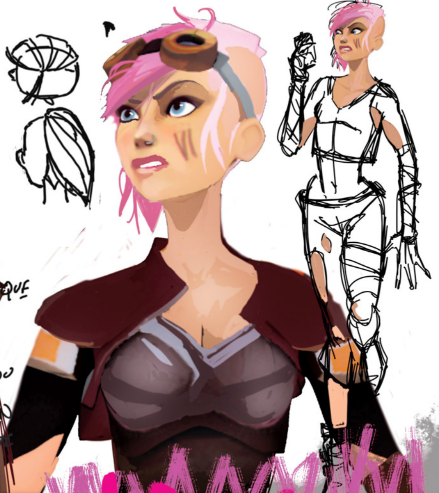
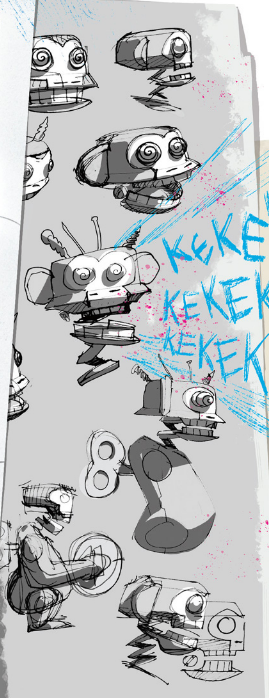
Early character, environment, and prop explorations for "Get Jinxed"

The two men asked if they could do some preliminary concept artwork, and put together still frames and illustrations on a shoestring budget. They had Fortiche create a brief animation test showing Jayce and Vi battling on a rooftop in Piltover, and eventually the game studio warmed up to the bold idea of hatching a show in-house. Movie studios had approached Riot in the past, but nothing had ever come out of those talks. "You need to play the game to know the game," Linke said of the disconnect leadership felt with potential outside collaborators. But he and Yee immediately felt simpatico with Fortiche, even though their new French collaborators were not expert gamers. What the two groups had in common was just as important: They shared artistic sensibilities and the desire to push the boundaries of animation, both from a storytelling and a visual standpoint.

Staying close to home in terms of the show's production was as much of an outlier decision as giving *League of Legends* away for free. As a comparison, most projects involving iterations of an intellectual property are not handled directly by that I.P. holder—even if it is, of course, closely involved in making sure quality control and a coherent universe are maintained throughout all the new projects. Riot could easily have said "We're a game company, we don't do animated shows, let's farm this out"—especially since it's headquartered in Los Angeles, where you can find everything and everyone you need to make film and television. With *Arcane*, the call was made to avoid the licensing route and instead keep things in-house, with Linke and Yee co-creating the series and acting as showrunners in tandem.







At the same time, the stars were aligning in terms of the game world nurturing a generation of creative folks able to handle storytelling in different mediums. "It's not that old of an industry," Linke said. "We're only now getting to a point where we have real adults who grew up with video games and are old enough to say, 'Hey, I'm experienced enough as a leader to make something as big as a TV show or a movie.' In the end, it definitely was a decision to say, 'You know, we should just try to do this ourselves because it really hasn't worked the other way around.'"

The decision was made to set the show in Piltover and Zaun, which sit between the Valoran and Shuriman continents of Runeterra, where *League of Legends* is set. Linke, Yee, and their new collaborators across the Atlantic went to work and created a pilot that combined the Riot Games universe with Fortiche's distinctive style—which mixed the studio's evocative, kinetic mix of 2-D and 3-D animation with live-action-inspired mise en scène (defined as the arrangement of scenery and stage before the camera).

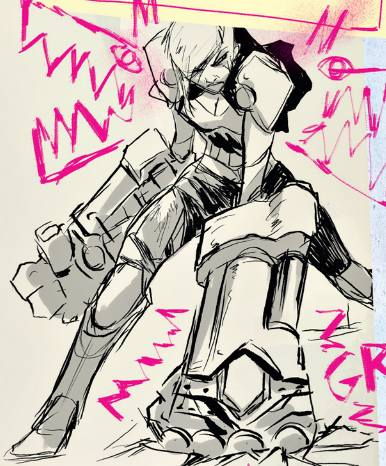
THIS PAGE
Animation test of early Vi model and final render

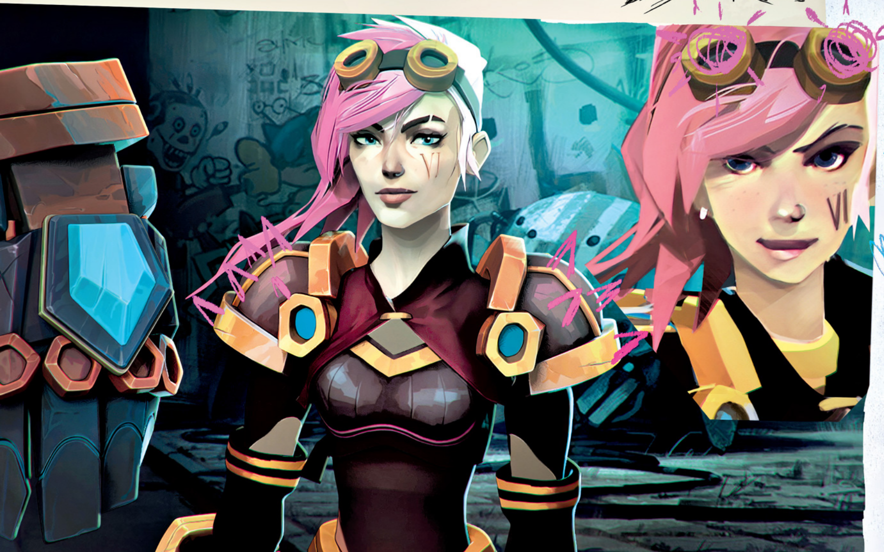
As the two teams set up to make a pilot, Linke acted as the main conduit to streamline the process. "For the first budget meeting, there was only Christian sitting opposite me," Dupont said. "We showed him a budget and he looked at his cell phone and said, 'Okay.' The meeting was finished within a quarter of an hour."

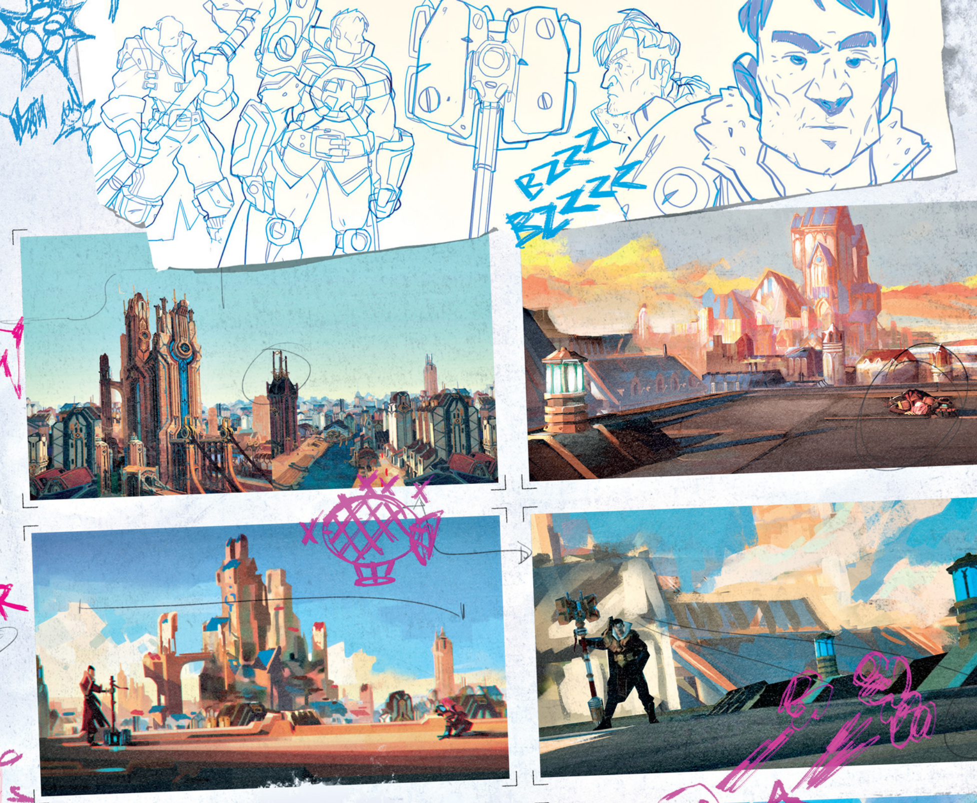
Everything seemed to require an astonishing amount of work—call it the price of perfection—and endless discussions ranging from minute details about a character's outfit to the overall tone. "We had to really nail it," Combe said. "Would it be like a summer blockbuster where you have a joke every two seconds, or would it be darker and more mature, and get us an adult rating? Our earliest storyboards had blood splattering everywhere. We have violence, people who smoke—you have to manage all that. We had deep conversations about all that." In this, as in pretty much everything related to *Arcane*, Riot and Fortiche were excited about exploring the limits: How much gore is too much? How can you make it feel as if the violence is earned rather than gratuitous, and impacts the characters? Everybody knew the stakes had to be high for viewers to care for the characters, and violence was a necessary part of that process.

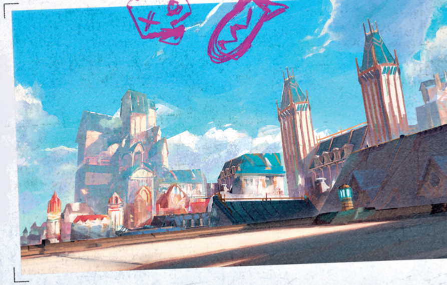
As with all large-scale endeavors, the road was not always smooth. The biggest speed bump happened just after Fortiche delivered the pilot at the tail end of 2017. Riot pressed the pause button to rethink its approach, in terms of both production process and narrative direction. In Paris, the three leaders of the French studio used some of their downtime to articulate their aesthetic and directorial principles in an internal document titled Directing the Fortiche Way. When the teams regrouped the following year, it was on a healthier, more effective base built on mutual trust. "I can certainly imagine a much more fraught process with someone you're new working with, or have a traditional vendor relationship with," Yee said. "We really feel like we're partners in figuring out how the story should evolve, and what's going to look good in the show. Fortiche, they're amazing at what they do even when what they're saying doesn't make sense in the room. You always have this piece of you that says, 'I know that if they're as excited as they seem to be, there's something they're seeing that I just can't see yet.'"

"THE DECISION WAS MADE TO ~~SE~~ SET THE SHOW IN PILTOVER AND ZAUN WHICH SIT BETWEEN THE VALORAN AND SHURIMAN CON~~T~~ ~~C~~TINENTS OF RUNETERRA, WHERE LEAGUE OF LEGENDS IS SET."









To further help *Arcane* cross the finish line, Riot hired producer Melinda Dilger in 2020. She devised an L.A. production pipeline in coordination with Hervé Dupont at Fortiche to complete the first season's nine episodes. It was around this time that Riot secured a distribution deal with Netflix. At the time the streamer's executives signed on based on the pilot and, really, not much else. That's because that one episode (which was further refined after the version delivered at the end of 2017) made the project's uniqueness evident: In less than an hour, viewers were introduced to a fully formed, visually and sonically sophisticated universe. Immediately, it established a sense of history and people you cared for, as well as a virtuosic mise en scène—the introductory parkour scene alone could be taught in film schools.

A major reason for *Arcane*'s success is that the show skillfully weaves seemingly irreconcilable perspectives and sensibilities into a cohesive whole. Think about it: A Los Angeles game company and an artsy French studio joined forces to create a series that delights players while also welcoming those who have never heard of Runeterra—or aren't into

OPPOSITE

Vi animation test concept art

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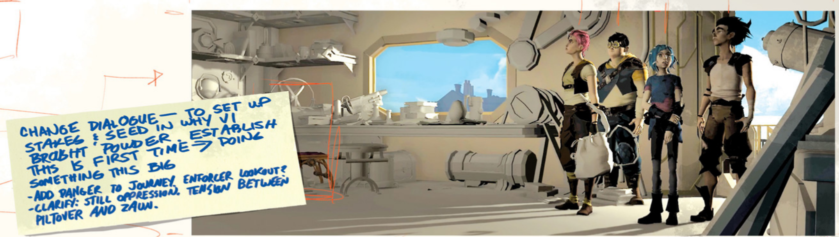
Animation test environments; Jayce concept art


CHANGE DIALOGUE — TO SET UP STAKES & SEED IN WHY VI BROUGHT POWDER ESTABLISH THIS IS FIRST TIME → DOING SOMETHING THIS BIG
-ADD DANGER TO JOURNEY. ENFORCER LOOKOUT?
-CLARIFY: STILL OPPRESSION. TENSION BETWEEN PILTOVER AND ZAUN.

arcane_strife_pilot | s100_p150 (45.0 mm)
S100 P150
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EXT. THE LANES 18
POWDER FINDS BLUE STONE IN HER POCKET AFTER VANDER 〈6 AVES

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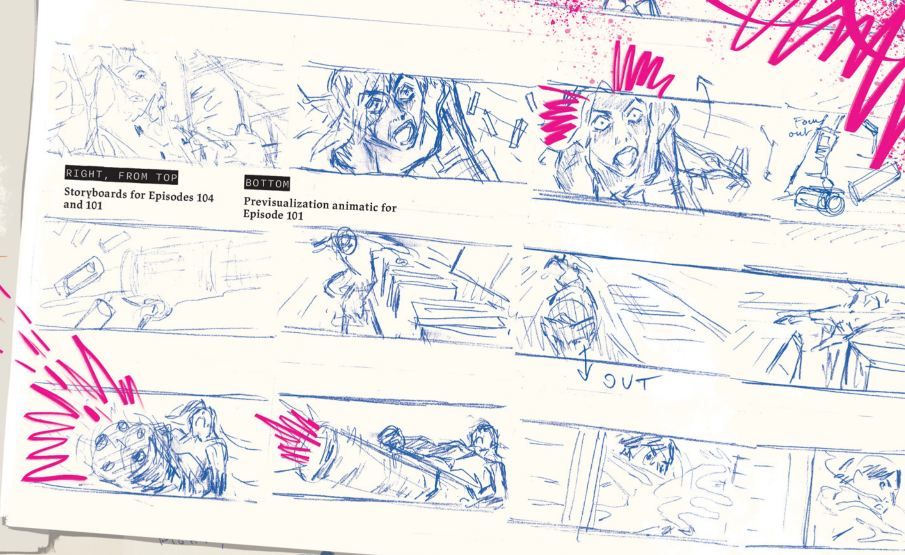
Previsualization layout and animation for the pilot

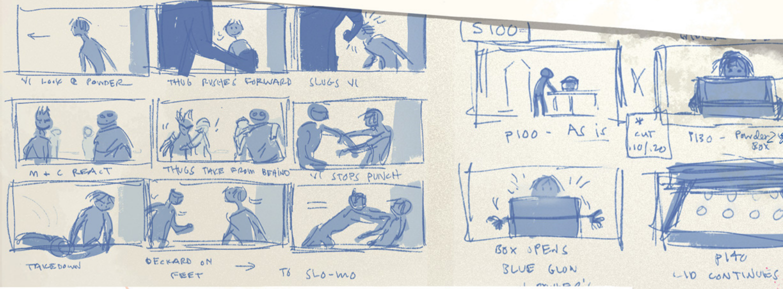


RIGHT, FROM TOP

Storyboards for Episodes 104 and 101

BOTTOM

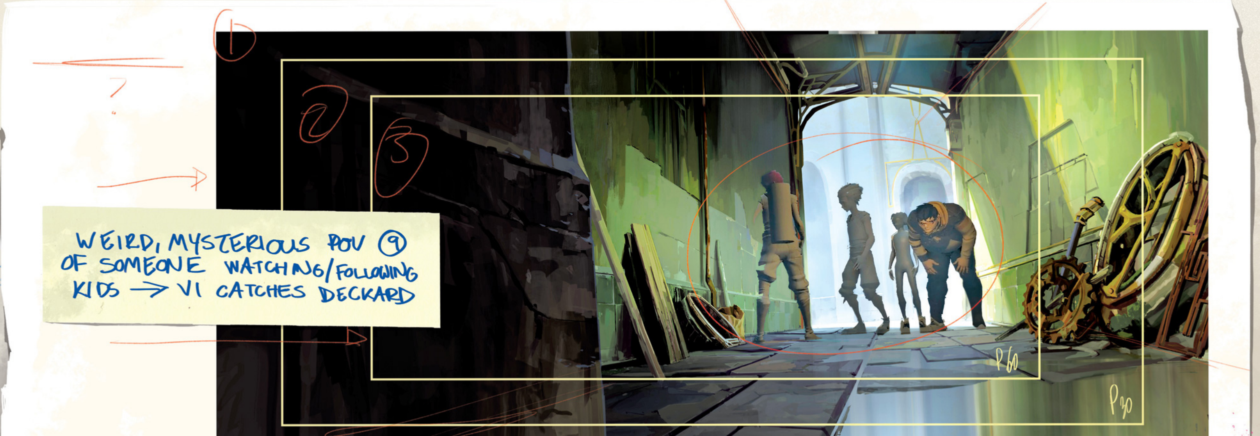
Previsualization animatic for Episode 101

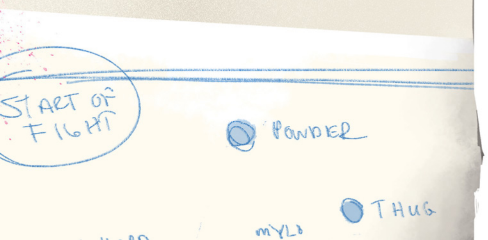

VI LOOK @ POWDER
THUG RUSHES FORWARD
SLUGS VI
M + C REACT
THUGS TAKE FROM BEHIND
VI STOPS PUNCH
TAKEDOWN
DECKARD ON FEET
→ TO SLO-MO
S100
P100 - AS IS
* CUT .10/.20
P130 - Powder's BOX
BOX OPENS
BLUE GLOW
P140
LID CONTINUES
REVEAL MA
(POWDER's POV)

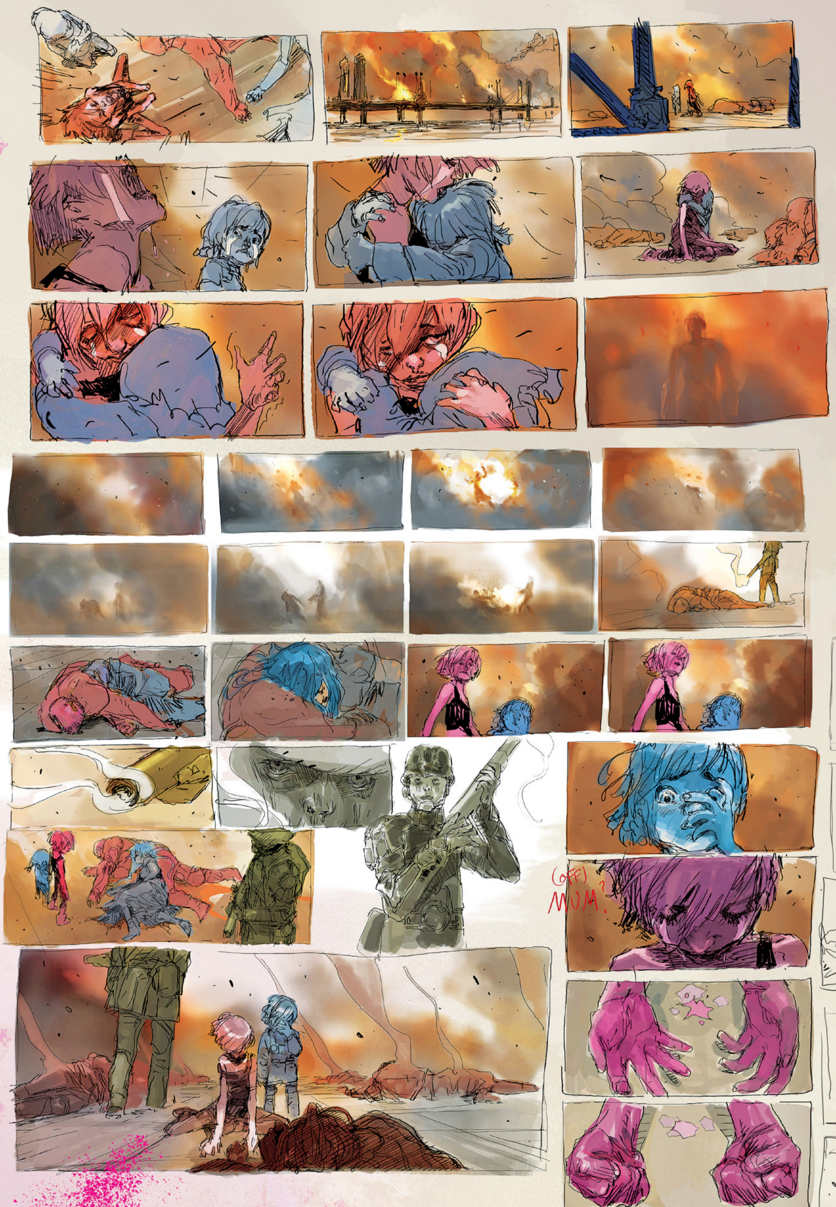
gaming to begin with. Dilger captured the mindset binding both teams: "I have always prided myself on working with people who know what they're doing," she said. "This taught me the really important lesson that you can get a new look, a new vision from people who are brand new to something. They're artists and they're not used to being pigeon-holed into any kind of formula. They haven't gone through the studio system, so they're not jaded at all. They just want to make something really cool, and different, and interesting. And you get that from Christian, Alex, Pascal, Arnaud, Jérôme, all those guys."

While the show's creators heavily drew from the painstaking worldbuilding (both internal and player-facing) that Riot had created over the years, *Arcane* also served as an opportunity to expand the Runeterra universe. Not only did Riot and Fortiche translate the *League of Legends* intellectual property into a two-season series that stands on its own, but over the years they have expanded the Runeterra universe by refining a creative loop in which the various Riot video games and the show feed into each other to form a thriving ecosystem. Champions from the game reemerge into the show; characters created for the show are integrated into the game; storylines and design elements bounce across the two mediums harmoniously.

"To be honest, I think we didn't realize how big of an impact it was going to have on players," marveled Paul Bellezza, director of creative game production at *League of Legends* studios. "But it did, and it came from the heart."


1
2
3
WEIRD, MYSTERIOUS POV 9 OF SOMEONE WATCHING/FOLLOWING KIDS → VI CATCHES DECKARD
P60
P30


START OF FIGHT
POWDER
THUG
MYLO



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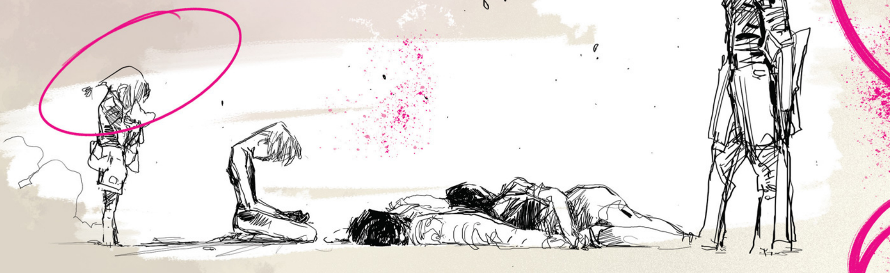
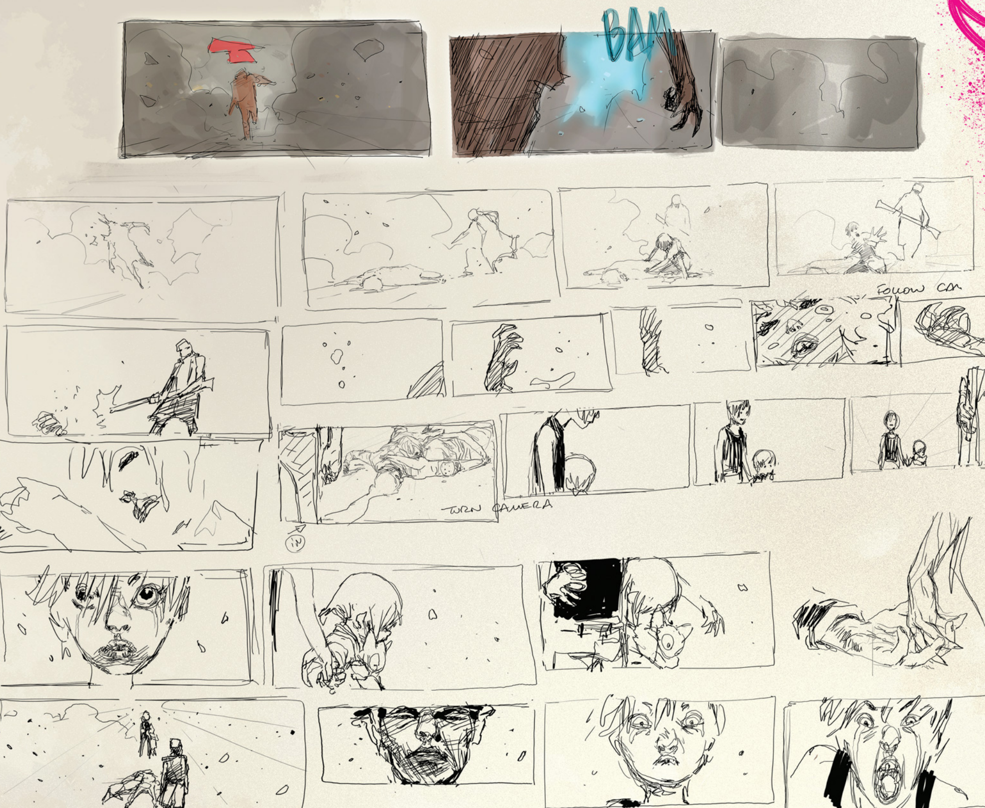
Storyboards of the opening scene of Episode 101

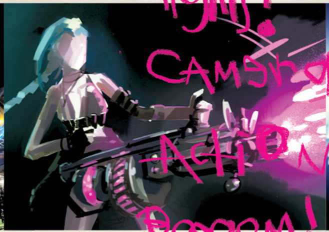



BAM
FOLLOW CAM
TURN CAMERA

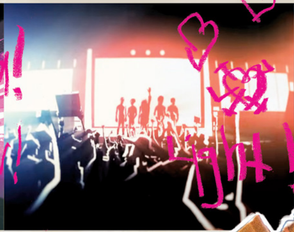
TIMELINE

2009 *League of Legends* is released in October.

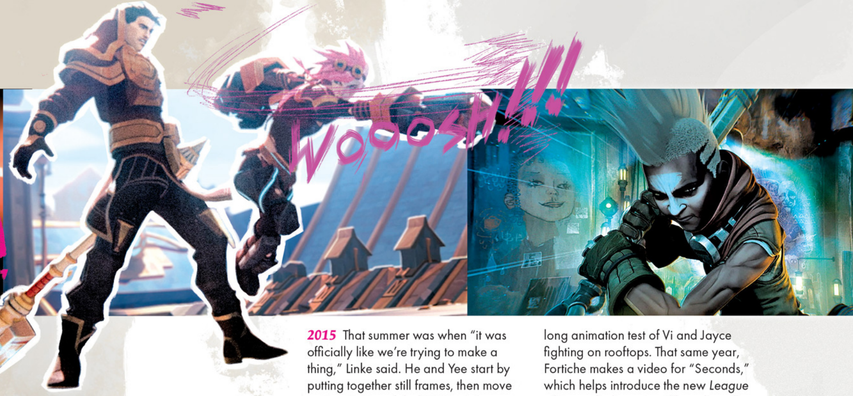
2011 Inaugural *League of Legends* World Championship, held in June.


lights!
Camera!
Action!
Booom!

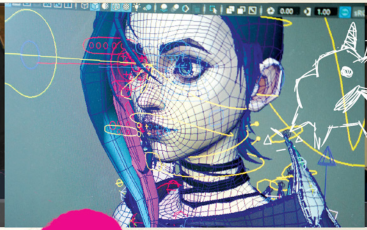
2013 "Get Jinxed" is uploaded to YouTube in September.



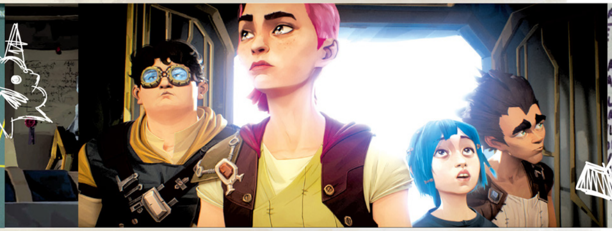
2014 Fortiche and Riot make a video for the Imagine Dragons song "Warriors," used in that year's World Championship.



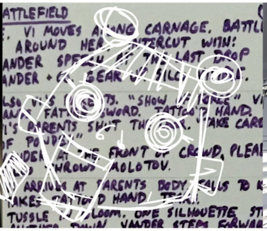
2015 That summer was when "it was officially like we're trying to make a thing," Linke said. He and Yee start by putting together still frames, then move on to a 3-D model of Vi. Next, they commission Fortiche to create a minute-long animation test of Vi and Jayce fighting on rooftops. That same year, Fortiche makes a video for "Seconds," which helps introduce the new *League of Legends* champion Ekko, who will become one of *Arcane*'s main characters.

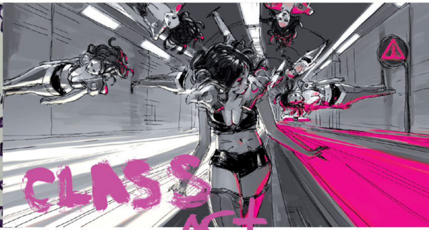


2016 Work on the pilot episode of *Arcane* begins in the fall. It will go on for ten months.



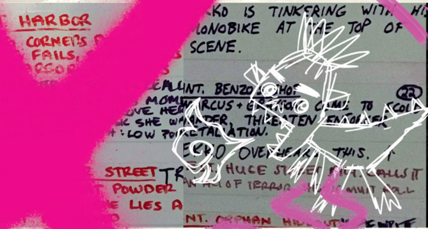
2017 In December, Fortiche delivers the pilot to Riot . . .

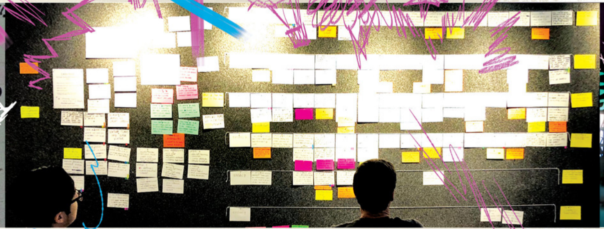




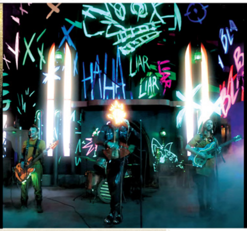
2018 . . . and in January the French company is informed that work on *Arcane* is suspended while Riot regroups to rethink the narrative approach and fine-tune the scripts. Maintaining its partnership with Riot during the hiatus, Fortiche produces videos for two *League of Legends*-related tracks: "Rise" and "Pop/Stars." The latter is the debut single by Riot's virtual K-pop group K/DA and is screened at the 2018 League of Legends World Championship.

In October, production on *Arcane* resumes. The creative relationship between Riot and Fortiche is clarified to everybody's satisfaction: The French studio is not a vendor, but Riot's creative partner. A mirrored and stronger production team is set up on both sides of the Atlantic to streamline and organize teams in order to support and enhance this unique creative partnership.

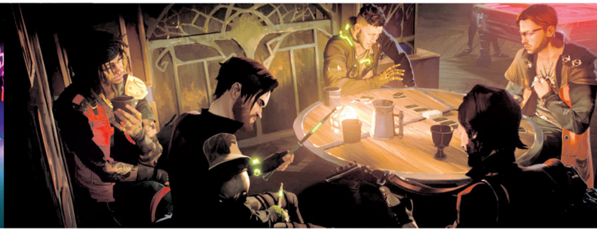




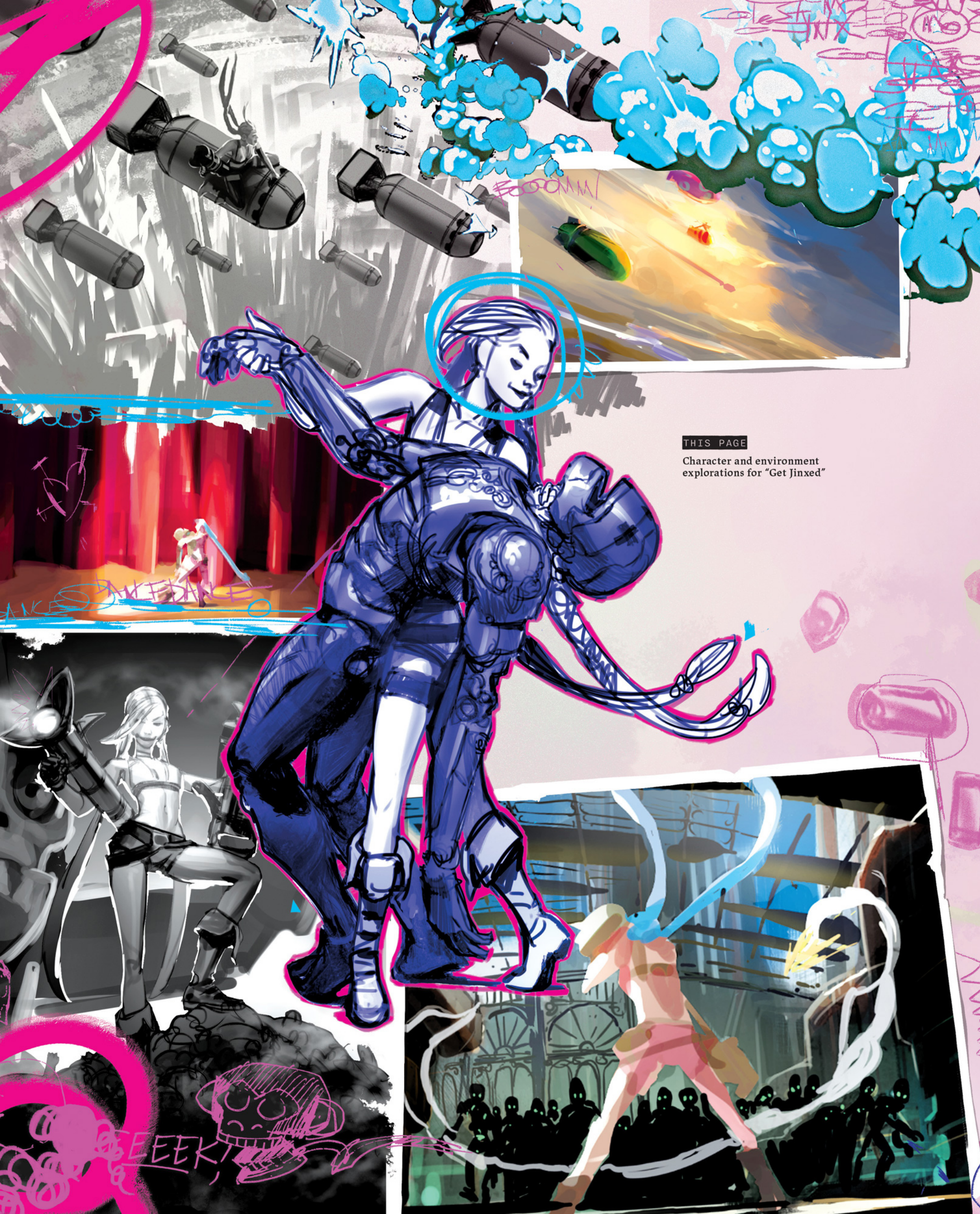
2019 Work on the show is chugging along as both teams figure out how to creatively solve the challenges they are facing and implement new ways of working—on their own but also with each other. It's worth remembering that this was unchartered territory for both companies; Fortiche, in particular, had to not just handle the production's artistic demands, but simultaneously expand its staff to handle the workload and create a brand new pipeline with which to do it.



2020 In March, Riot and Fortiche's goal was to get *Arcane* ready to be presented at 2021 Worlds and released worldwide on the same date. The enormous amounts of passion and talent involved, and an all-consuming drive to bring *Arcane* to fruition without compromising on quality, brought both Riot and Fortiche to success.



2021 Riot and Fortiche premiere the video for Imagine Dragons and JID's "Enemy" at 2021 Worlds. The song hits No. 5 on the Billboard Hot 100 chart, and also plays over the beginning credits of *Arcane*—which debuts on Netflix a few days after Worlds, on November 6th.



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Character and environment explorations for "Get Jinxed"

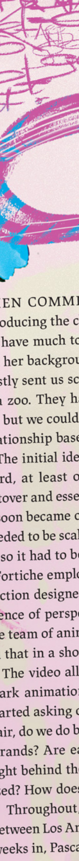
GET JINXED

WHEN COMMISSIONED TO CREATE A VIDEO introducing the champion Jinx, the Parisian studio did not have much to go on. "They sent us the Jinx design and her background story," Arnaud Delord said. "They mostly sent us scenes, like when she freed the animals in a zoo. They had some background information for her but we could pick and choose in the lore. We had a relationship based on trust."

The initial idea for the video was pretty straightforward, at least on paper: Vi and Jinx are fighting in Piltover and essentially wrecking the city in the process. It soon became obvious that this was too ambitious and needed to be scaled down. "We didn't have time to make Vi so it had to be only Jinx," said Arnaud-Loris Baudry, a Fortiche employee at the time who is now a lead production designer at Riot. "We painted without any reference of perspective—it was pure 2D artwork sent to the team of animators, who were struggling to animate all that in a short amount of time."

The video allowed Fortiche to start refining its hallmark animation techniques. Jérôme Combe said, "We started asking ourselves a lot of questions like, 'For the hair, do we do big chunks or do we have more individual strands? Are ears translucent enough that we can see light behind them? Are teeth in one row or individualized? How does light reflect on someone's neck?'"

Throughout, Linke was acting as the intermediary between Los Angeles and Paris. Baudry recalls that "three weeks in, Pascal was like, 'Okay, Christian, we are super happy that you like it, but how does everyone else feel at Riot?' And Christian was like, 'Oh, I haven't shared it with anyone. I will share it when I think it's ready.' That's when I understood that it was his baby. And if we make something right—and Fortiche always does something great—it will work out, ultimately."



It did. Fortiche made its tight deadline and "Get Jinxed" was a hit, racking up millions and millions of views on YouTube. The video opened up a new chapter in the *League of Legends* story, even if that became clear only in hindsight.

Just as important, the video also set the tone of the collaborative spirit between Riot and Fortiche. For example, Jinx was supposed to be diving on a big bomb, and Linke asked Fortiche if they could paint something on it. Baudry remembers submitting around twenty different designs for the bomb. "Christian said, 'Yes.' And we were like, 'Which one?' 'All of them.' And that's why you have a lot of bombs," Baudry concluded with a flourish. "That was Christian's mindset: 'Okay, yeah, perfect, you are going in a good direction. I'm not stopping you—I'm empowering and emboldening you to be crazy.'"

The following year, Riot commissioned Fortiche to make a video for the Imagine Dragons song "Warriors," which would be used to promote the 2014 *League of Legends* World Championship. The song premiered in September and a month later Riot flew a team from Fortiche to South Korea so they could all attend the massive esports event together. The American and French crews were watching the video projected on giant screens at the Seoul World Cup Stadium when Linke noticed something different: At the end of the video the players are shown entering an arena, and what was beaming out from the Jumbotron looked exactly like the very place they happened to be at. This had not been the case in the version that had already been uploaded to YouTube. "I was like, 'Did you change the video?'" Linke recalled asking the Fortiche people. "And they were like, 'Yes, of course. We knew it was going to play on this big screen and it must look the best.'"

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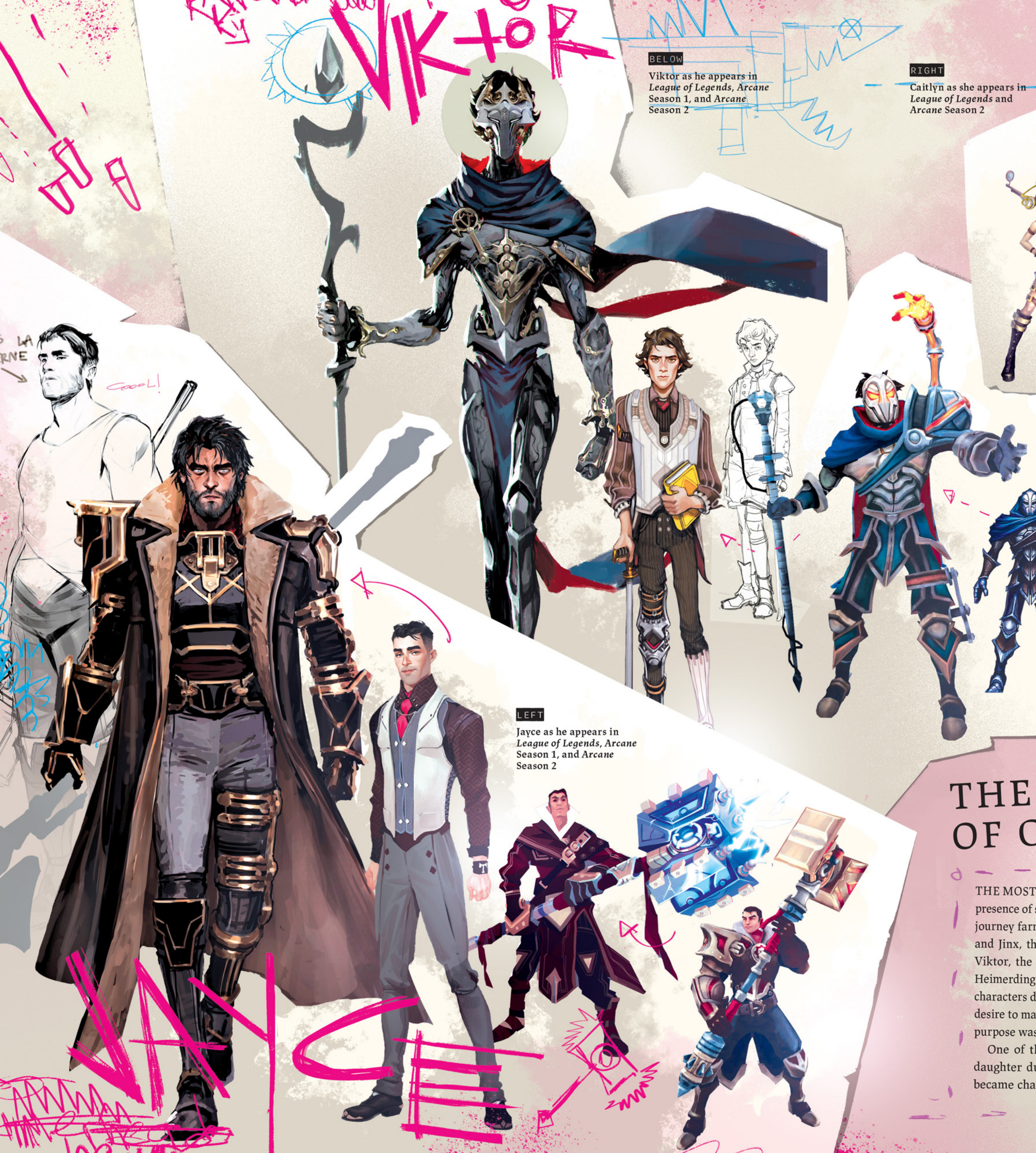
Design exploration of Jinx's bombs from "Get Jinxed"

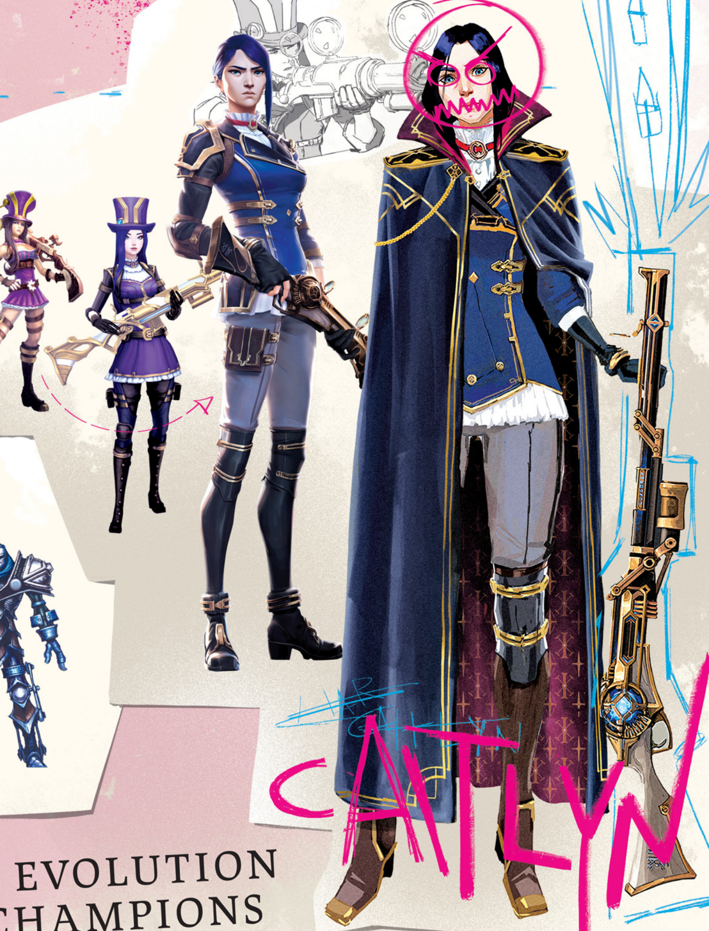


BELOW

Viktor as he appears in *League of Legends*, *Arcane* Season 1, and *Arcane* Season 2

LEFT

Jayce as he appears in *League of Legends*, *Arcane* Season 1, and *Arcane* Season 2



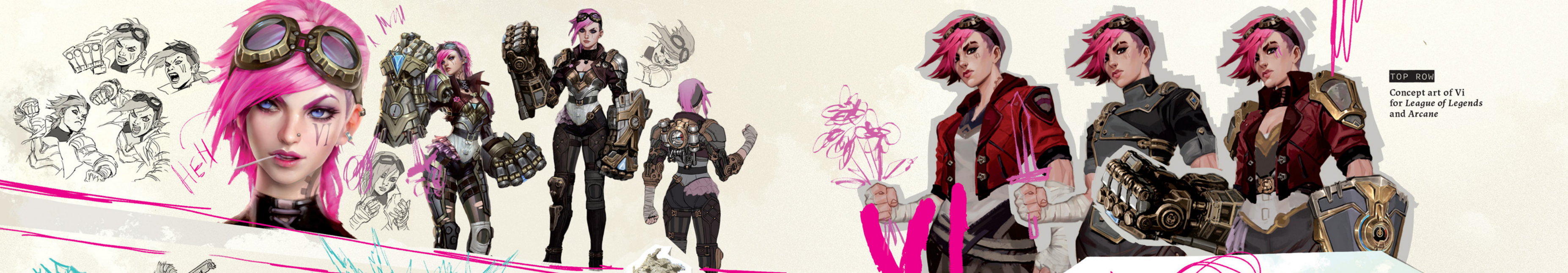
RIGHT

Caitlyn as she appears in *League of Legends* and *Arcane* Season 2

THE EVOLUTION OF CHAMPIONS

THE MOST VISIBLE CONNECTIVE TISSUE BETWEEN *LEAGUE OF LEGENDS* AND *ARCANE* IS THE presence of some of the game's 160-plus champions in the series. All of *Arcane*'s major characters began their journey farming minions and tackling teamfights. First and foremost the sisters Vi, the Piltover Enforcer, and Jinx, the Loose Cannon. They were joined by the inventors Jayce, the Defender of Tomorrow, and Viktor, the Machine Herald. Caitlyn, the Sheriff of Piltover; Ekko, the Boy Who Shattered Time; and Heimerdinger, the Revered Inventor, and a few others soon followed to fill out the cast. In Season 1, the characters do not necessarily look or act the way their champion models do in the game. This ties in to the desire to make the show accessible to viewers unfamiliar with the game, but also to the idea that the show's purpose was, in large part, to trace their evolution.

One of the show's most exciting developments is that the traffic flows both ways: The mother-daughter duo of Ambessa and Mel, who hail from the empire of Noxus, are *Arcane* originals who became champions in *League of Legends*.



TOP ROW

Concept art of Vi for *League of Legends* and *Arcane*

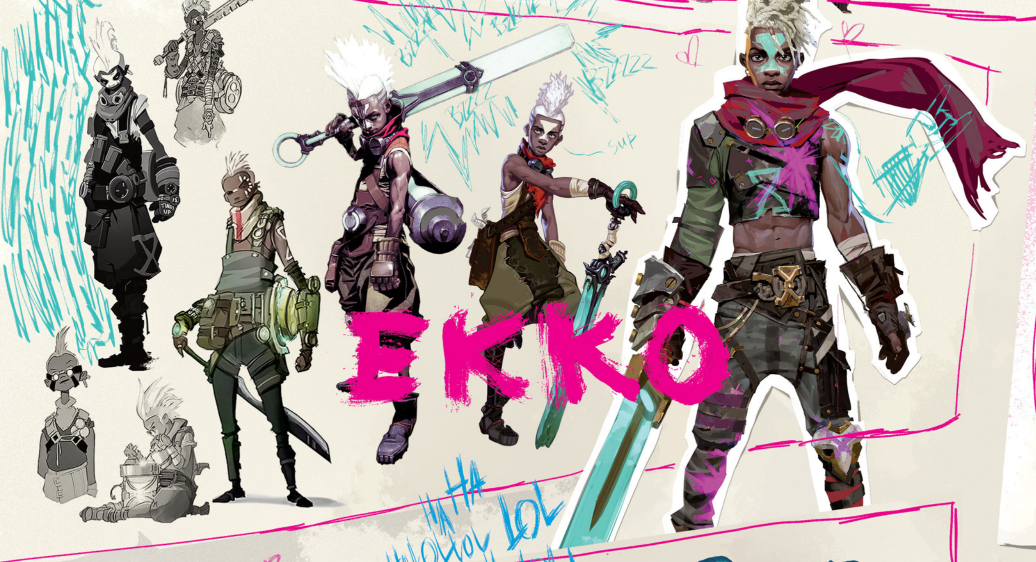
2

SYMBIOSIS AND SYNTHESIS

WHEN RIOT AND FORTICHE STARTED TO WORK ON *Arcane* in earnest, there was much discussion about how to create an animated TV show that could exist on its own while being faithful to the stories in *League of Legends* over the years. It was a challenge, but an exciting one as each company was stepping into unknown territory and, in a way, testing its own mettle.

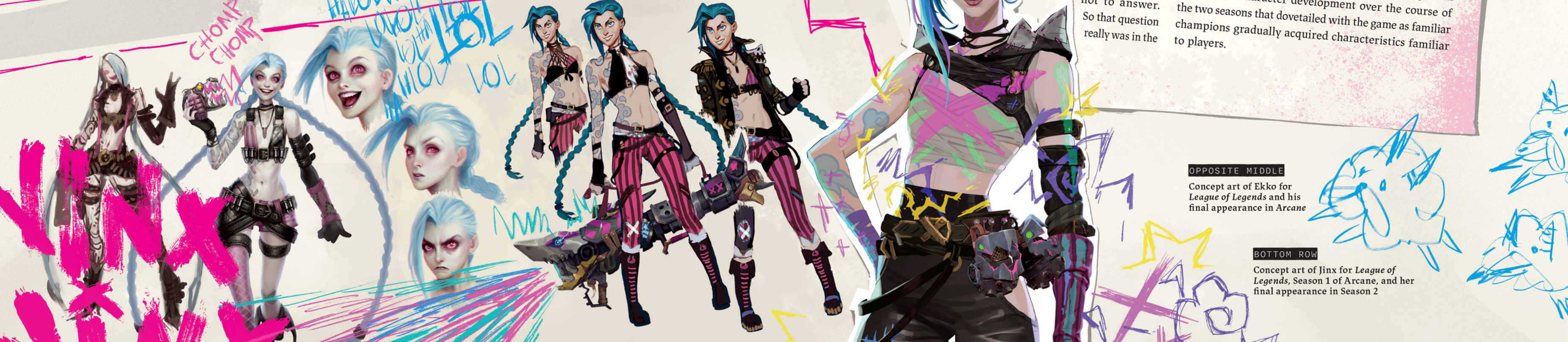
Pascal Charrue explained Fortiche had to walk a tightrope to make sure fans of the game would not feel betrayed while also appealing to newcomers. "Right away we asked Christian who the project was for," he said. "He knew it would have to appeal to fans, with Easter eggs and so on, but he had the smarts not to answer. So that question really was in the back of my mind. I told Christian that I'd love it if my wife could watch *Arcane*. I've worked in gaming—I met Jérôme [Combe] at a video-game company around 1999, 2000—but I wasn't a huge consumer. We made 'Get Jinxed' like a music video, not a classic game teaser."

For Charrue, there was a lesson to be learned from the way the *Game of Thrones* series reached an audience beyond that of readers of the George R.R. Martin source novels. "I'm not into heroic fantasy and I would never have watched the first season of *Game of Thrones* if it had gone into dragons and the likes right away," he said. "But it started off with politics and the dragons came later. That's how we approached *Arcane*: At the beginning, the champions are not the ones we know from the game." Not only did this ensure that nobody would feel left out by insider references, but the approach allowed for character development over the course of the two seasons that dovetailed with the game as familiar champions gradually acquired characteristics familiar to players.



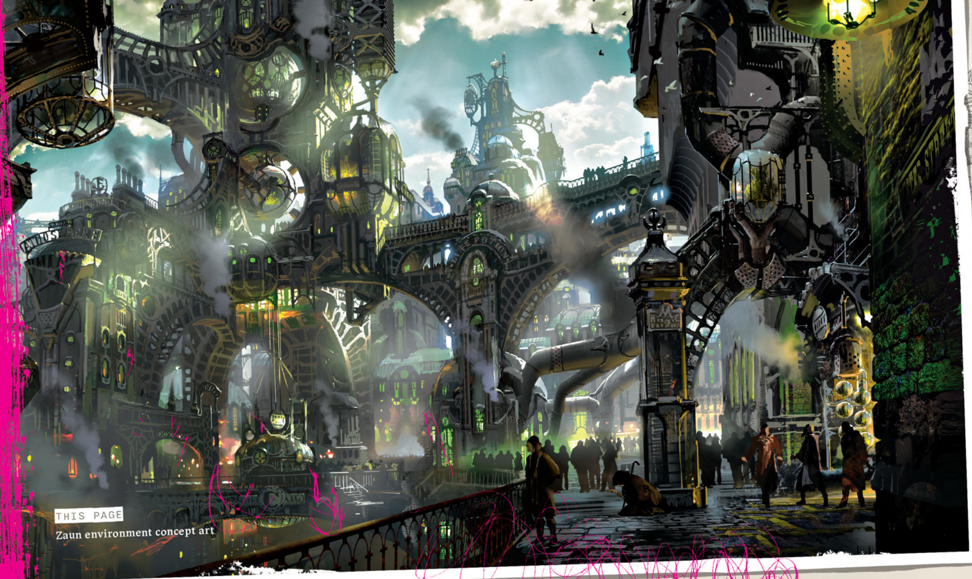
OPPOSITE MIDDLE

Concept art of Ekko for *League of Legends* and his final appearance in *Arcane*



BOTTOM ROW

Concept art of Jinx for *League of Legends*, Season 1 of Arcane, and her final appearance in Season 2



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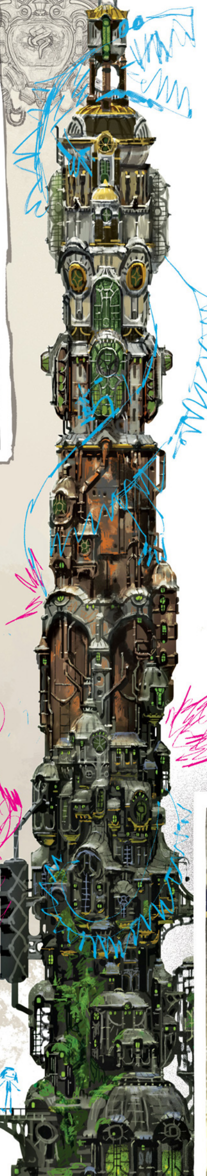
Zaun environment concept art

Christian Linke remembers that the issue of the target audience came up when he was working on Pentakill, the virtual heavy-metal band created for *League of Legends*. "The question was, 'Should the lyrics reference the game closely or should they tell their own story?' So I did both because I wasn't sure. The takeaway was that our players don't want to be pandered to—they want something that feels like it's good and stands on its own. It felt obvious to us that they would be willing to call out stuff that was corny."

Of course, it helped that *Arcane* had been conceived at Riot and not outsourced. As showrunners who happened to be longtime Riot employees, Linke and Yee were crucial to making sure the game's DNA was ever-present in the series. At their disposal, they had mountains of backstory and worldbuilding that couldn't easily be shown in *League of Legends*. Yee explains that all champions have backstories, even if those stories don't end up figuring much in the actual gameplay. "We targeted three hundred–word biographies on the game," he said. "Some characters had around one thousand–word color stories, but it was pretty sparse. We had a lot of wiggle room, and we also had a bit of trust because we've worked on those characters for such a long time. Though I will say that in the process of developing those bios and color stories for the characters and fitting them into the world, the narrative team would have a lot of conversations about who they were and how they fit in. I always had the feeling that what would be player-facing in what we had in our heads about these characters was the tip of the iceberg. In my mind, there were a lot of hooks to grab on to. Knowing that there was so much behind the scenes that we hadn't released to the players, it was also a big part of the motivation to try and get something like the show made. It was like, 'Man there's so much world here that we wish we could show you in greater fidelity.'"

Coincidentally, Paul Bellezza, director of creative game production at *League of Legends*, reached for the same simile when talking about the huge amount of work leading to relatively little that's visible to players. "In the early days, we just kept it open enough to go, 'There's probably an iceberg there. We don't know how big or shallow it is so let's leave it open so that anything can happen,'" Bellezza said. "It was just the constraints of the time. Then the team started to refine that process to really think through art design and animatics. We all know that the art, the story, and the game design needed to synergize; but we would lean more on one or the other. Nowadays, they build new characters with a huge iceberg with tentacles to other icebergs. They would build with a lot of depth so that they can write other things, but back then it was the Wild West."



Arnaud-Loris Baudry confirms that *Arcane* benefited from the extensive groundwork done "in the shadow," as he put it, for *League of Legends*. "How the worldbuilding team works is that it was basically a council made up of a narrative team, writers and artists who are working for a full year on one country, or one city in the case of Piltover and Zaun," he said. "Once they are done, they spend the next year on another section, and after three years, for example, they can go back and revisit the first section based on how it impacted the game at Riot."

Baudry, originally from France, left Fortiche for Riot in the very early days of *Arcane*, when the teams in Paris and Los Angeles were figuring out how to develop the visual side of the show while staying true to the game's essence. "Christian was trying a lot of stuff, asking a lot of questions," Baudry recalls. "It was really worldbuilding, like: 'Which type of races would we find in Piltover? What does high society look like? What are people eating?' It was a really small team, we were probably only three back then [in Los Angeles]. I was working with a writer directly when they were writing a scene and making some concepts and sharing them with Paris, where they had a whole team of artists who had different points of view, so it was a lot of back and forth."

"We used to have our animation teams work with some of the other studios when we were looking at doing some of the short video cinematics, and we always had this principle that the characters in our game had this heightened movement," Yee said. "It was more than what you would get with motion capture or with live actors, so with animation, it felt more true to the vibrance and the buoyancy of the world."

"*League* to me as a player was always special because it did have a bit of spunk in the tone, the quirkiness, and the not taking itself too seriously that felt like it had to be in there," Linke said.

LEFT

Architectural stratification between Piltover and Zaun

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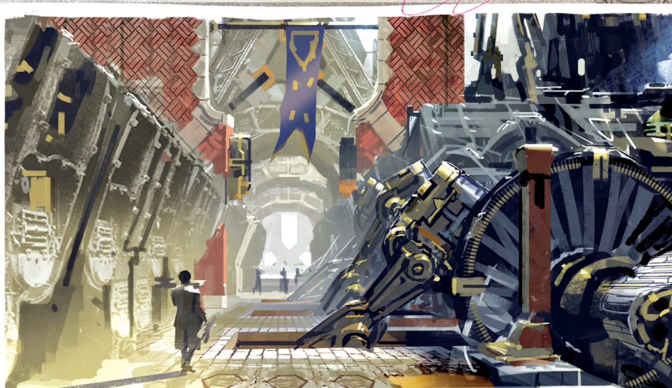
Piltover environment concept art



When *Arcane* really got underway, Larry Ray, who is now an art director of *League of Legends*, was a member of the Champions Update team at Riot. He recalls that almost from the start, the idea was to integrate the game and the show so that they would form one coherent lore. "*Arcane* was really trying to tell a great story with all these characters, but leaving breadcrumbs to existing characters in the current game, like Singed, Warwick, or Powder, who eventually becomes Jinx," he said. "It was really cool collaborating with them so early."

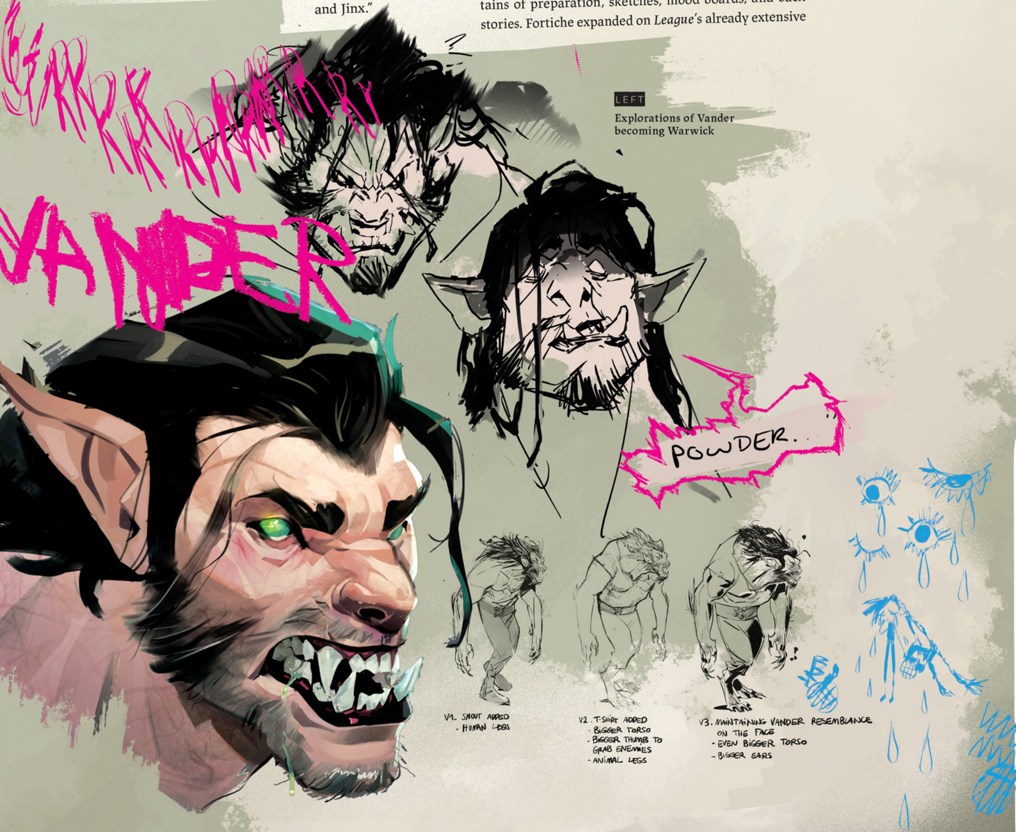
Bellezza sees Warwick as a good example of the intricate interplay between League and *Arcane*. "His backstory got rechanged because of what *Arcane* did," he said. "The original Warwick was Singed's assistant who got experimented on and turned into a werewolf. Warwick is one of our most popular characters—he's very powerful and very easy to play. Then they updated him to be more of this chimera-like beast of Zaun, and hinted at connections with other characters in Zaun, including Vi and Jinx."

Fans' curiosity was pricked up, and in return they theorized about a potential connection between Vander and Warwick when Season 1 came out. "Our players are so incredibly smart that they will pick up on the smallest details and make all these hypotheses and theories," Ray said. "It's getting harder and harder to trick them, but that's the fun part of it."

In the early days, there could be cultural and organizational differences between the two companies running *Arcane*. Hervé Dupont, Fortiche's managing director, mentions Jane Chung, who then was *Arcane*'s executive producer at Riot, as a key interlocutor during the getting-to-know-you era. "She was a true guide to the Riot culture, explaining how it worked, the keys to the in-house management," he said. "It meant that we could really try to understand one another. She found a shared vocabulary to interpret the project, and that was fantastic."

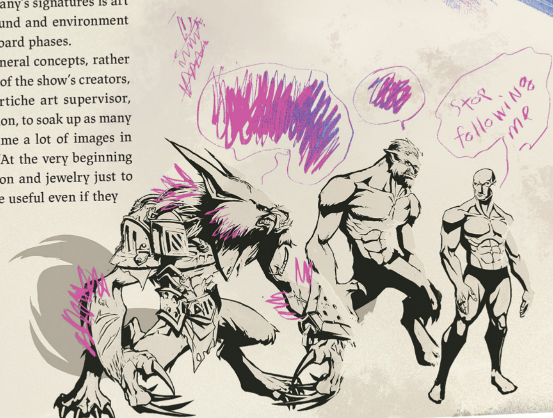
One thing that united both companies was this care for extensive worldbuilding. Just like a lot of unseen work goes into *League of Legends*, *Arcane* rests on mountains of preparation, sketches, mood boards, and back stories. Fortiche expanded on *League*'s already extensive worldbuilding to further enrich the world of Runeterra, while staying faithful to the game. One of the French company's signatures is art direction, which encompasses both background and environment designs as well as the colorscript and colorboard phases.

It's especially fascinating to hear what general concepts, rather than specific references, fed the imagination of the show's creators, often in indirect ways. Anne-Laure To, Fortiche art supervisor, explains that the process begins with immersion, to soak up as many sources and options as possible. "We consume a lot of images in every medium you can think of," she said. "At the very beginning it's all over the place. We can look at fashion and jewelry just to have an idea of shapes—things that could be useful even if they appear to be very different."



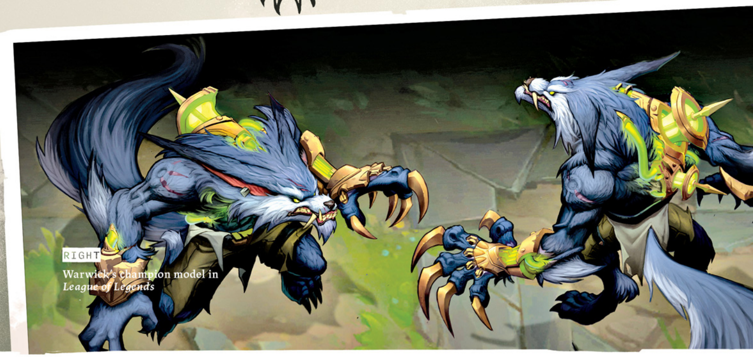
LEFT

Explorations of Vander becoming Warwick



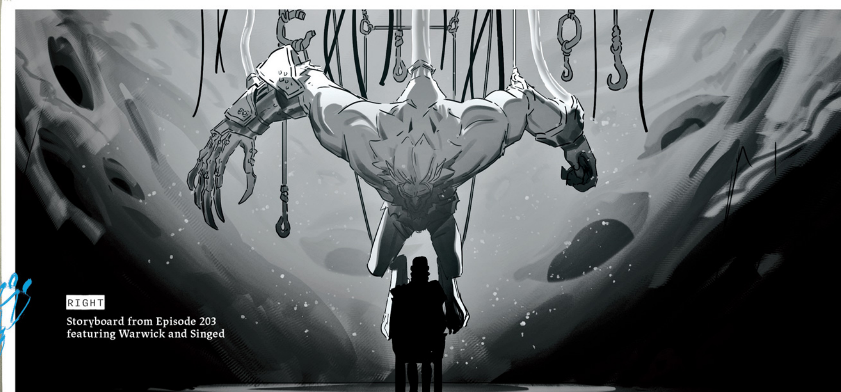
RIGHT

Anatomy explorations for Vander and Warwick



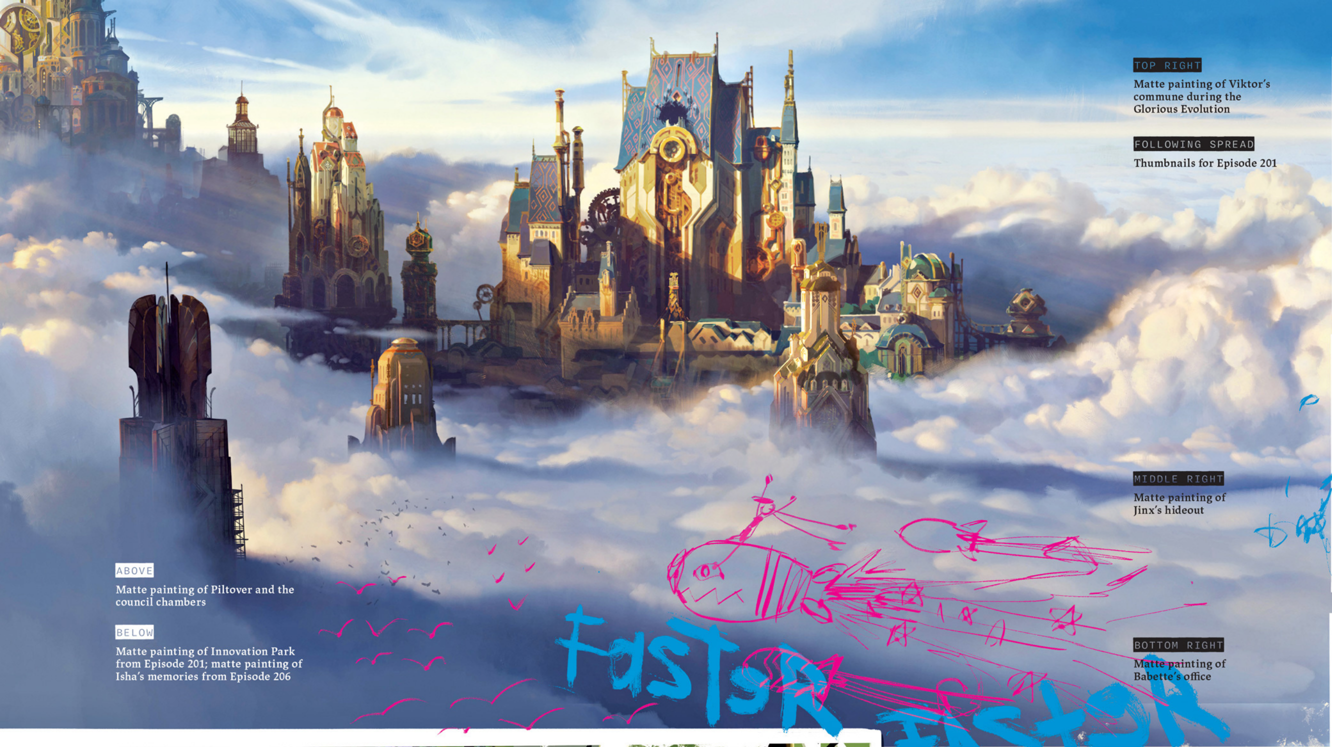
RIGHT

Warwick's champion model in *League of Legends*



RIGHT

Storyboard from Episode 203 featuring Warwick and Singed

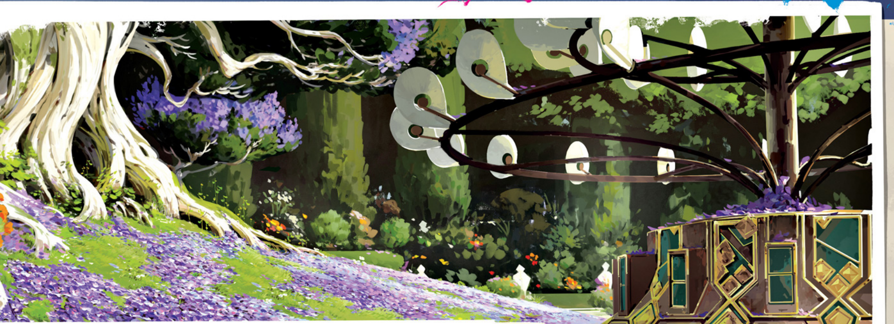


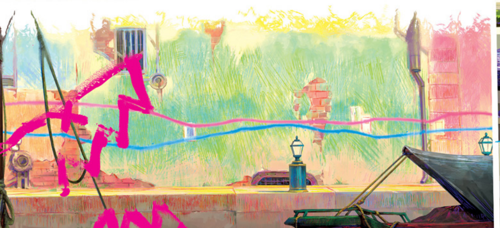
ABOVE

Matte painting of Piltover and the council chambers

BELOW

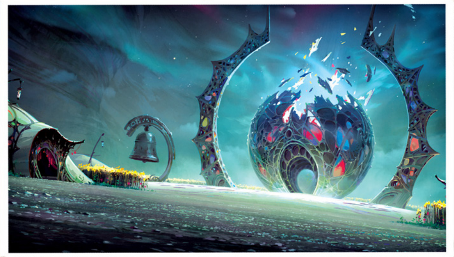
Matte painting of Innovation Park from Episode 201; matte painting of Isha's memories from Episode 206





TOP RIGHT

Matte painting of Viktor's commune during the Glorious Evolution

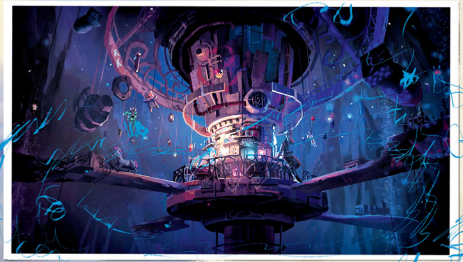


FOLLOWING SPREAD

Thumbnails for Episode 201

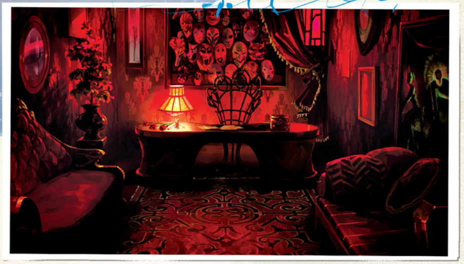
MIDDLE RIGHT

Matte painting of Jinx's hideout



BOTTOM RIGHT

Matte painting of Babette's office

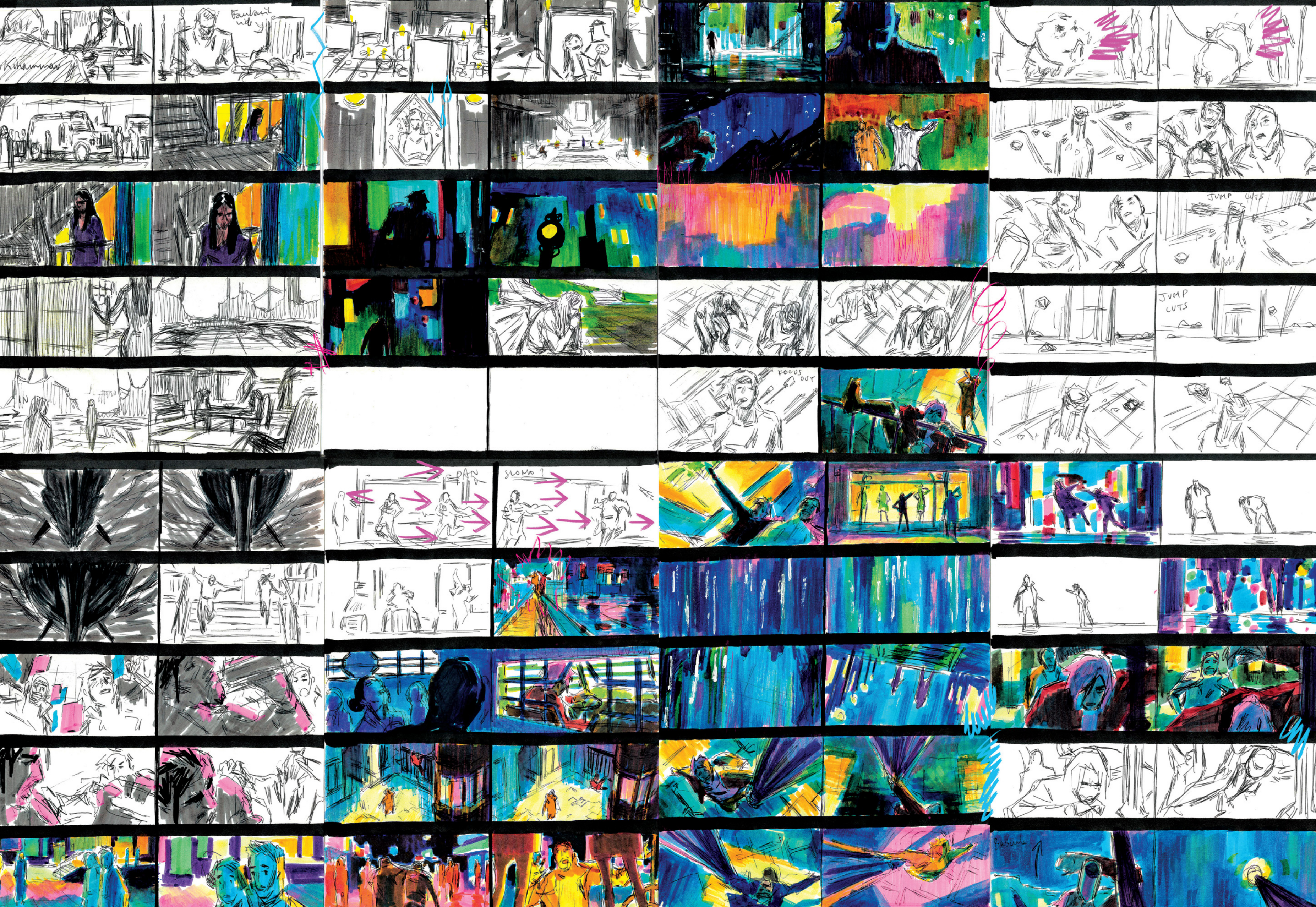


Some of the inspiration for the world of *Arcane* does not look obvious at first glance, but informs the very way characters are conceived and visualized. "I think shapes, color, lines have their own language," To said. "Just because a shape has been developed for a certain end does not mean you can't extrapolate and repurpose it to tell a different story."

What is so arresting about *Arcane* is that the show's aesthetics work on both the macro and the micro level: There are large-scale decisions affecting the way we perceive locations and characters, telegraphing meaning, and more minute details filling each image with meaning. In other words, the eye candy must make sense within a coherent universe.

Color palettes play a huge part in that grand design, for example. For Anne-Laure To, part of the inspiration for the way color is used in the show can be traced all the way back to the twelfth century and medieval Europe. "I think it comes from heraldic art," she said. "There are several sides to color. There is symbolism: This character is predominantly red, that character is predominantly blue, this substance is toxic so it's green, and so on. Then there is the physical element: What does a color represent, how does it help spatialize light? It's also a tool that helps composing an image, where it draws the viewer's attention to a specific area."

Color does not just play a representational role in *Arcane*, it helps bolster the storytelling just as much as, say, the score. "People might not necessarily listen closely to the music but they are going to feel it, so music can suggest the emotional tone of a scene," To said. "Color and sets are like music in that they are a part of the storytelling that might impact viewers without them consciously realizing it. We work on feeling, impressions, and we make sure colors work hand in hand with characters. For example, for Jinx's secret lair, we use colors associated with her, especially blue and violet. We try to make sure that her universe looks like her and at the same time shows her off. We use a palette that can be very playful and child-like but with an element of dissonance that puts you a little bit on alert."


Khamman
Fauteuil vide
JUMP CUTS
JUMP CUTS
FOCUS OUT
PAN
SLOMO ?
Bascule

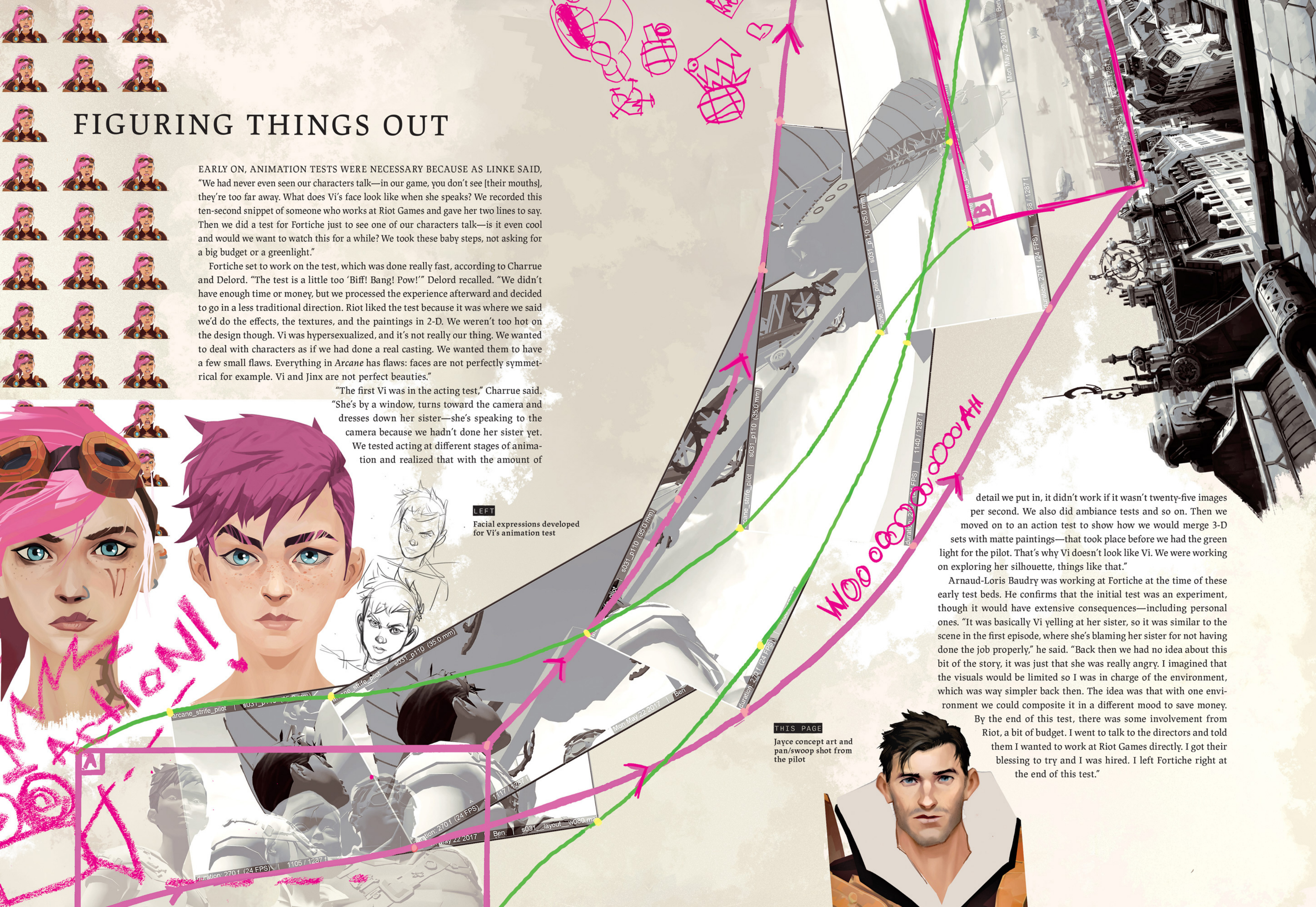
FIGURING THINGS OUT

EARLY ON, ANIMATION TESTS WERE NECESSARY BECAUSE AS LINKE SAID, "We had never even seen our characters talk—in our game, you don't see [their mouths], they're too far away. What does Vi's face look like when she speaks? We recorded this ten-second snippet of someone who works at Riot Games and gave her two lines to say. Then we did a test for Fortiche just to see one of our characters talk—is it even cool and would we want to watch this for a while? We took these baby steps, not asking for a big budget or a greenlight."

Fortiche set to work on the test, which was done really fast, according to Charrue and Delord. "The test is a little too 'Biff! Bang! Pow!'" Delord recalled. "We didn't have enough time or money, but we processed the experience afterward and decided to go in a less traditional direction. Riot liked the test because it was where we said we'd do the effects, the textures, and the paintings in 2-D. We weren't too hot on the design though. Vi was hypersexualized, and it's not really our thing. We wanted to deal with characters as if we had done a real casting. We wanted them to have a few small flaws. Everything in *Arcane* has flaws: faces are not perfectly symmetrical for example. Vi and Jinx are not perfect beauties."

"The first Vi was in the acting test," Charrue said. "She's by a window, turns toward the camera and dresses down her sister—she's speaking to the camera because we hadn't done her sister yet. We tested acting at different stages of animation and realized that with the amount of detail we put in, it didn't work if it wasn't twenty-five images per second. We also did ambiance tests and so on. Then we moved on to an action test to show how we would merge 3-D sets with matte paintings—that took place before we had the green light for the pilot. That's why Vi doesn't look like Vi. We were working on exploring her silhouette, things like that."

Arnaud-Loris Baudry was working at Fortiche at the time of these early test beds. He confirms that the initial test was an experiment, though it would have extensive consequences—including personal ones. "It was basically Vi yelling at her sister, so it was similar to the scene in the first episode, where she's blaming her sister for not having done the job properly," he said. "Back then we had no idea about this bit of the story, it was just that she was really angry. I imagined that the visuals would be limited so I was in charge of the environment, which was way simpler back then. The idea was that with one environment we could composite it in a different mood to save money. By the end of this test, there was some involvement from Riot, a bit of budget. I went to talk to the directors and told them I wanted to work at Riot Games directly. I got their blessing to try and I was hired. I left Fortiche right at the end of this test."



LEFT

Facial expressions developed for Vi's animation test

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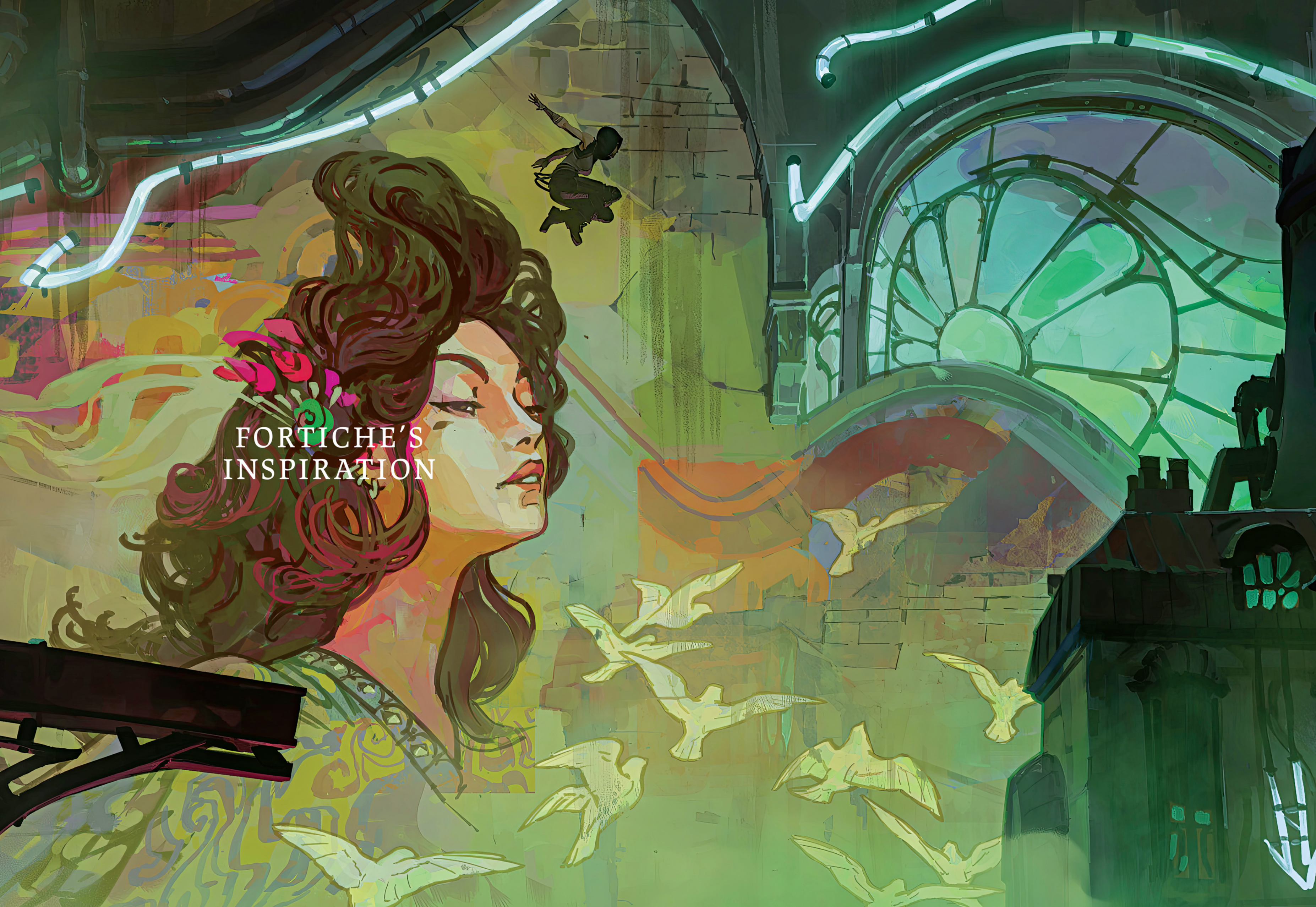
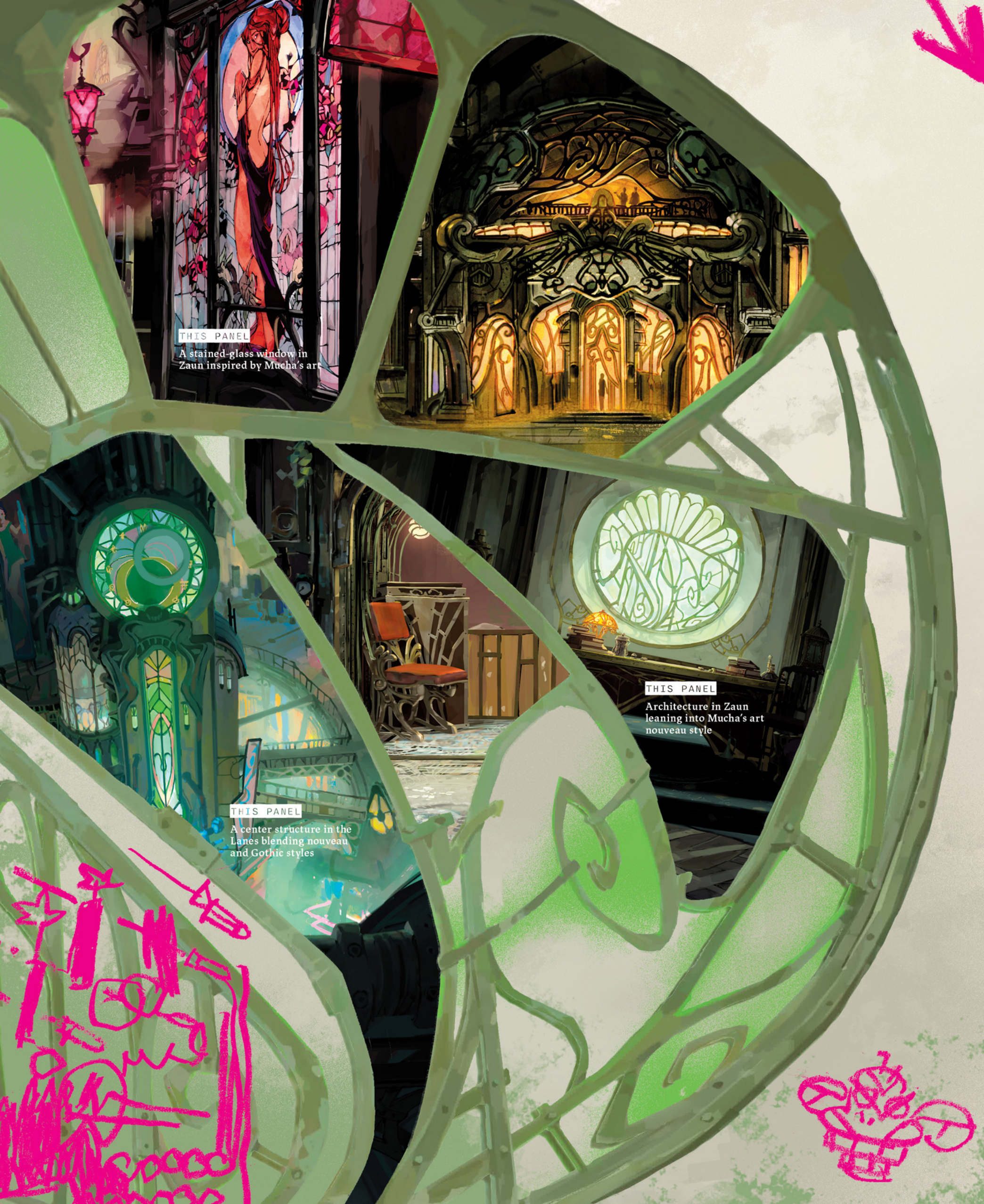
Jayce concept art and pan/swoop shot from the pilot

FORTICHE'S INSPIRATION





THIS PANEL
A stained-glass window in Zaun inspired by Mucha's art

THIS PANEL
Architecture in Zaun leaning into Mucha's art nouveau style

THIS PANEL
A center structure in the Lanes blending nouveau and Gothic styles

YOU CAN EASILY WATCH *ARCANE* AND GET DRAWN into its characters and storylines, but what makes the show particularly rewarding for astute viewers is the myriad of influences it contains, down to nods to specific books, films, and pieces of art. Just one example of many, from the very first episode: We briefly meet a couple of shady characters arguing in Vander's bar, and the big man has to intervene. Those two colorful supporting characters are named Jules and Verne after the nineteenth-century author of *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*, *Journey to the Center of the Earth*, and other classics. There are also echoes of videos, graphic novels, and quite a few 1980s dark synth pop groups.

Some of those names might appear self-evident: Of course a French studio working on a series that incorporates steampunk elements is going to embrace Verne, whose books are filled with the crazed scientists and determined explorers so common in that genre. Less immediately obvious are such creators as the avant-garde Dutch fashion designer Iris van Herpen, whom the Fortiche team namechecked as someone who was on their minds when they worked on Season 2. A vast array of influences fed the creators' imagination and, as a result, the viewers' as well.

Much was informed by an approach that seems counterintuitive at first glance. "*Arcane* is not conceived like an animated series," Pascal Charrue said. "Most of our references are live-action series or movies." Looking at the Fortiche founders' workspaces at the company's headquarters in Paris, one can see posters for classic Hollywood movies; shelves are packed with as many books about filmmakers as there are about art or design.

Some of the mise en scène decisions were influenced by specific live-action directors, chief among them Brian De Palma, who is revered in France a lot more than he is in his native United States, and is a big deal among Fortiche employees—almost all the people interviewed for this book brought him up. De Palma is cited, for example, as one of the prime influences on the suspenseful scene in Episode 201 when Vi realizes that enemies have infiltrated the memorial ceremony for the council members killed in Jinx's attack. "I was thinking of a scene in *The Untouchables*, which itself nods to *Battleship Potemkin*—they exchange glances, the tension ratchets up," Arnaud Delord said.

One technique the directors were judicious about is slow motion, which, in the wrong hands, can easily become a cliché. "It's used either in a De Palma way, or in a Zack Snyder way—very music video," Delord said. "There are different kinds of slo-mo. We have a John Woo reference in the parkour scene with birds that fly off when Vi jumps. I'm not sure it's exactly John Woo because we did it pretty fast," he said, grinning. "Pascal is very familiar with all that stuff. For me it's John Woo, *Akira*."

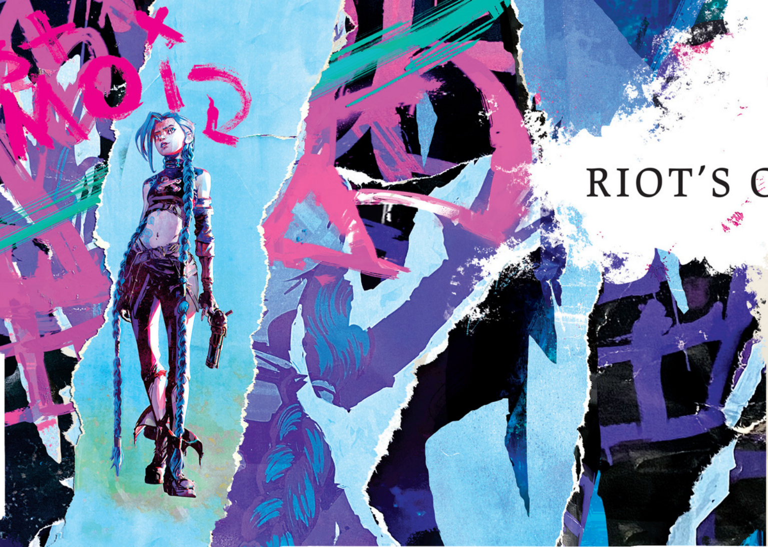
Even with the focus on live action, there are animated references after all. Charrue brought up the Japanese directors of ambitious animated dramas Satoshi Kon (*Perfect Blue*, *Millennium Actress*) and Mamoru Hosada, whose 2012 movie *Wolf Children* is, he said, "the only film we all agree on in my family." He also singled out the mangaka Naoki Urasawa, who created the psychological thriller *Monster*, which was serialized from 1994 to 2001 and later adapted into an animated series. "What's great about *Monster* is that you can set aside the main character for a while, catch up with him later and see that he's changed," Charrue said. "Similarly, *Arcane* has characters who have the potential to become something different and more interesting. I was really involved in the way characters evolved over time. I find someone like Viktor really exciting—he starts off a supporting character and evolves into one of the leads. In *Monster*, I didn't like the main character, who's a surgeon. After a while I was tired of him. I felt Jayce was the same, a follower who made wrong decisions, but at the end of Season 2, he owns up to his past choices."

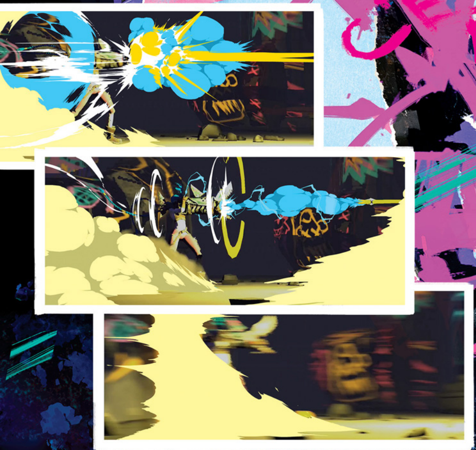
Of particular note is Alphonse Mucha, a Czech painter and illustrator whose groundbreaking work at the turn of the twentieth century heavily influenced Fortiche's work on *Arcane*—so much so that the studio participated in the multimedia exhibition *Eternal Mucha*, which took over the Grand Palais Immersif, in Paris, in March–November 2023.

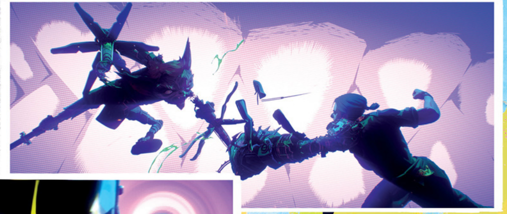
A boundary-busting pioneer, Mucha worked extensively in advertising and design. He developed a style that was notable for its precise draftsmanship and swirling patterns, and its use of color and elaborate details. Every frame of a Mucha piece is filled to the brim, creating a sense of richness that rewards close attention. You can find traces of his legacy in everything from the psychedelic posters of the flower-power musical revolution in 1960s San Francisco to the work of the comic-book artist Joe Quesada, the designer and illustrator Yoshitaka Amano, the mangaka Akiko Hatsu, and the mech designer and director Yutaka Izubuchi.

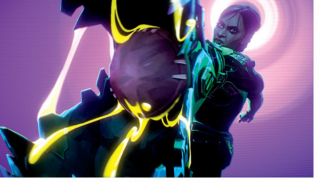
Looking at *Arcane*, and in particular Piltover, you can see nods to Mucha—especially since one of his signature achievement is a series of pieces he made for the Paris Universal Exposition of 1904, an event tied to the time's ideals of progress and discovery, which also reflect those of a certain topside city. After Vi leaves jail in Episode 105, she returns to Zaun and parkours her way down. In one memorable shot, she looks as if she is flying in front of a mural that is very obviously influenced by Mucha.

And of course, every episode starts with portraits of Vi and Jinx spinning a record, looking as if they have stepped out of a Mucha illustration.



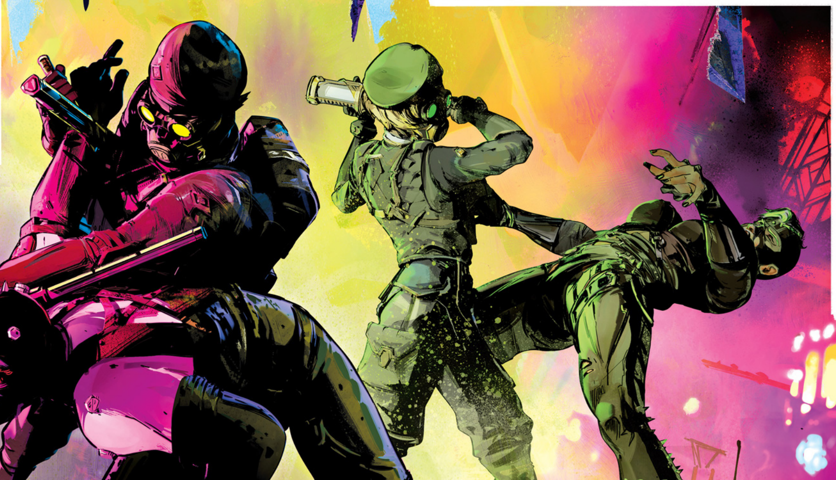






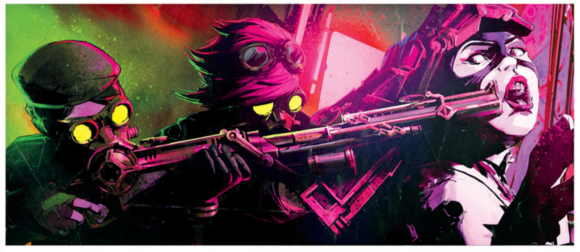
ABOVE

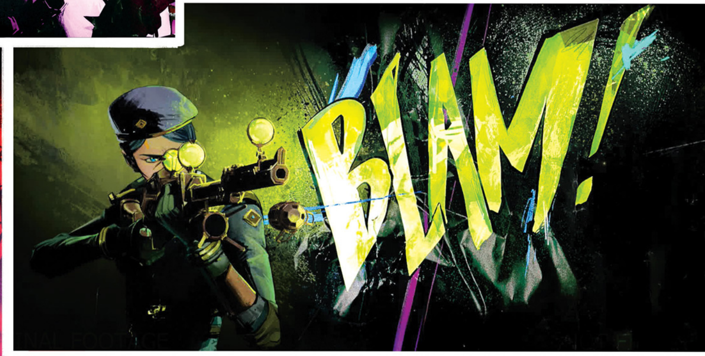
2-D FX tests and final composites from Episodes 202 and 203



RIOT'S CREATIVE ROOTS

"WE WERE LOOKING FOR A TONE THAT WAS REALLY difficult to find, something that felt a little more mature and a little more serious," Alex Yee said. "With lots of fights and that was still spunky, but was not aiming down to the audience, like, for kids. It took a little bit of time to try and find what that spot was. I remember the distinct moment when we were looking at different scripts and different characterizations for Jinx and Vi. It was this weird moment when the more serious anime were a bridge between what felt like the entertainment of my youth and the more serious shows that I liked, like *The Sopranos* coming out and TV having its renaissance. There were a couple of anime like *Cowboy Bebop* and *Trigun* that were a bridge between those two genres, and we were looking for this kind of in-between. I also think we were edging a little mature because we were watching shows like *Game of Thrones*, *Daredevil*, and *Peaky Blinders* that were really cool and had almost comic book themes, and that was something that you just didn't see that much on TV before."





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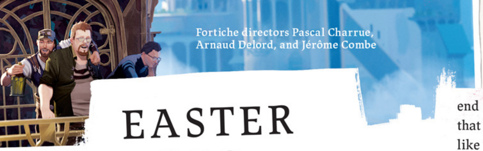
Concept art of Caitlyn's task force taking down chem-baron goons

ABOVE

2-D FX combined with final composites for Episode 203



Fortiche directors Pascal Charrue, Arnaud Delord, and Jérôme Combe

EASTER EGGS

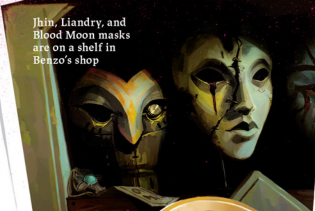
LEAVING EASTER EGGS HAS BECOME A pop-culture tradition, and *Arcane* does not ever forget that the original impetus behind the series' creation was giving back to gamers. The Easter eggs that are included provide fan service without being distracting to newcomers, and they can also allow for quick nods to the creatives. "We definitely had a rule going in that the Easter egg can't be the point of the scene: It can only be support material. And it has to not be something that's going to create that question-mark moment for someone who's not going to get it," Alex Yee said. "I feel we were reasonably strict on that point because that kind of head-scratching moment is not worth it."

But of course, those who know, know. "If you read the comic that went out when Ekko the champion was released, there's another character that was in there that was in the cinematic that you recognize," Linke said. "Benzo was holding something when Ekko comes in, and he is holding an item that only real nerds would know: the Heart of Gold. It hasn't been in the game for ten years or so. Those who recognize that one will be very giddy because obviously it's something that very few people still know."

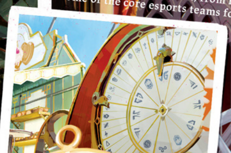
Easter eggs can also be partly used to ground a scene within the *League of Legends* lore, as in the scene where Mel is painting on her balcony in Episode 106. "The graphic style of her work and what she's painting, for those in the know, refer to visuals of Noxus that exist," said Hervé Dupont, managing director at Fortiche.

Of course, nothing gets past fans. "In Season 1 we wanted to tease that Singed had a daughter so he's opening a little clock and there's a picture of a girl," Baudry said. "It was just to tease, but the fans saw it and we actually did it in Season 2. In the game there is a character called Orianna, who is supposed to be a little girl from Piltover who had a disease and whose limbs were replaced bit by bit until she became a robot. The last piece was supposed to be a heart, which her father gives her. When she wakes up as a robot, she doesn't understand who she is and her father is dead. We did something a bit different: In Season 2, we see that all Singed was doing was to find a serum and save his daughter. So at the end of a corridor with all the horrible stuff that he's done, there is a little room looking like Piltover—we kind of understood in Season 1 that he was from Piltover and used to work with Heimerdinger, he's probably one hundred years old or something, and was able to prolong his life. Ambessa asks what Orianna has and his answer is something like, 'I'm trying to find a cure to something that affects us all—death.'"

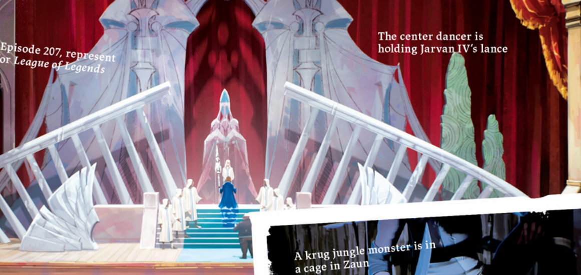
Sometimes, though, eagle-eyed fans assign intent where there is none. "Some of them find things we didn't put in—they think we're a lot more cunning than we actually are, as if we were Keyser Söze," Fortiche character and props design supervisor Matthieu Gouget de Landres said, laughing. Echoing Linke and Yee, he stressed that as fun as Easter eggs are, they must never be distracting or make segments of the audience feel excluded. "As soon as we can include a little detail, we do it, but it never gets in the way of the storytelling," Gouget de Landres said. "With some adaptations, entire scenes sometimes don't make sense if you don't know the source material."



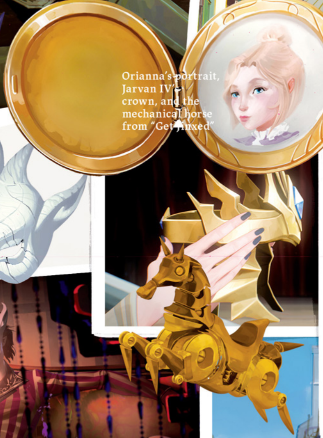
Jhin, Liandry, and Blood Moon masks are on a shelf in Benzo's shop



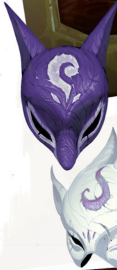
The symbols on this clock, from Episode 207, represent some of the core esports teams for *League of Legends*

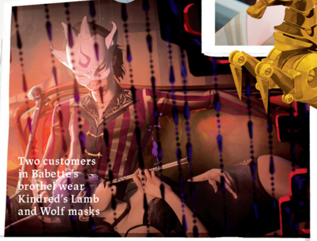


The center dancer is holding Jarvan IV's lance

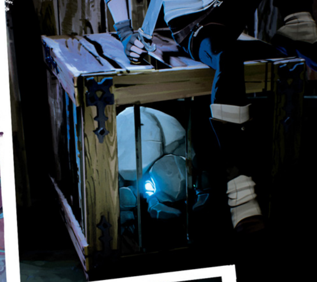


Orianna's portrait, Jarvan IV's crown, and the mechanical horse from "Get Jinxed"

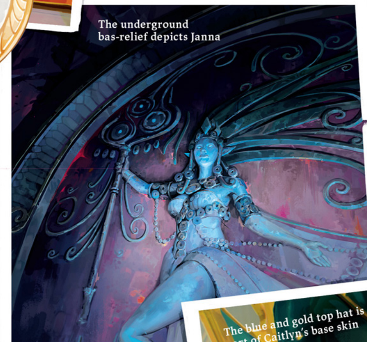




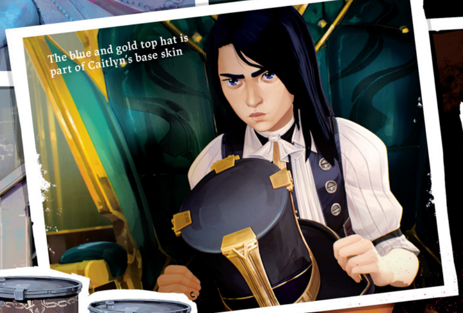
Two customers in Babette's brothel wear Kindred's Lamb and Wolf masks



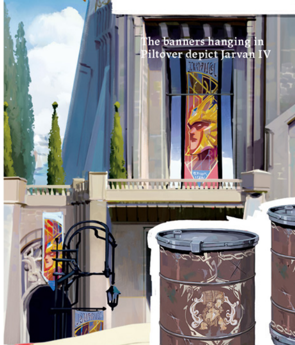
A krug jungle monster is in a cage in Zaun



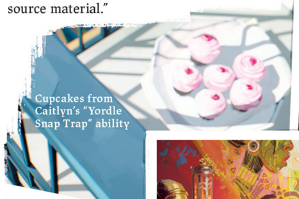
The underground bas-relief depicts Janna



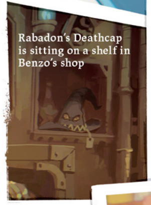
The blue and gold top hat is part of Caitlyn's base skin



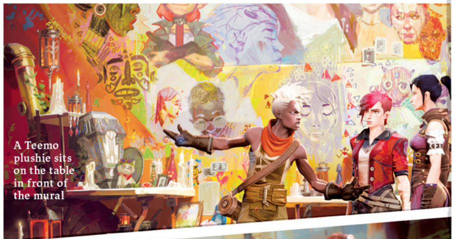
The banners hanging in Piltover depict Jarvan IV



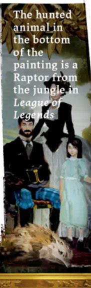
Cupcakes from Caitlyn's "Yordle Snap Trap" ability



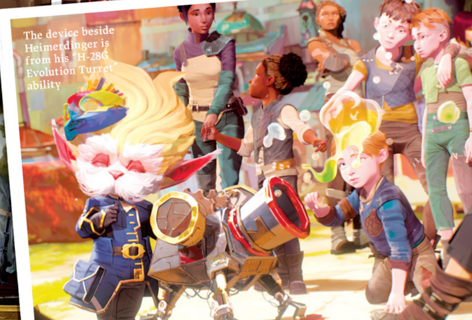
Rabadon's Deathcap is sitting on a shelf in Benzo's shop



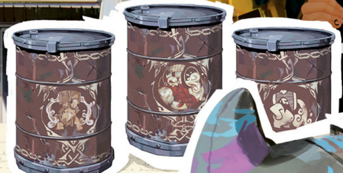
A Teemo plushie sits on the table in front of the mural

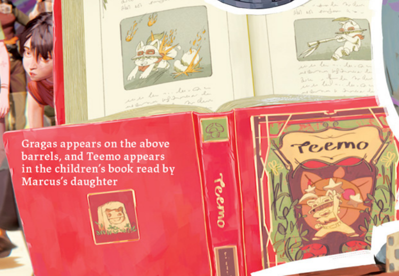


The hunted animal in the bottom of the painting is a Raptor from the jungle in *League of Legends*

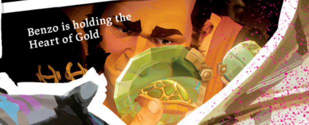


The device beside Heimerdinger is from his "H-28G Evolution Turret" ability

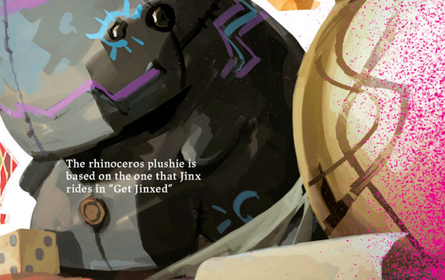




Gragas appears on the above barrels, and Teemo appears in the children's book read by Marcus's daughter

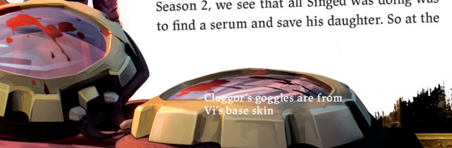


Benzo is holding the Heart of Gold



The rhinoceros plushie is based on the one that Jinx rides in "Get Jinxed"

Fortiche directors Arnaud Delord, Jérôme Combe, and Pascal Charrue with Christian Linke



Claggor's goggles are from Vi's base skin

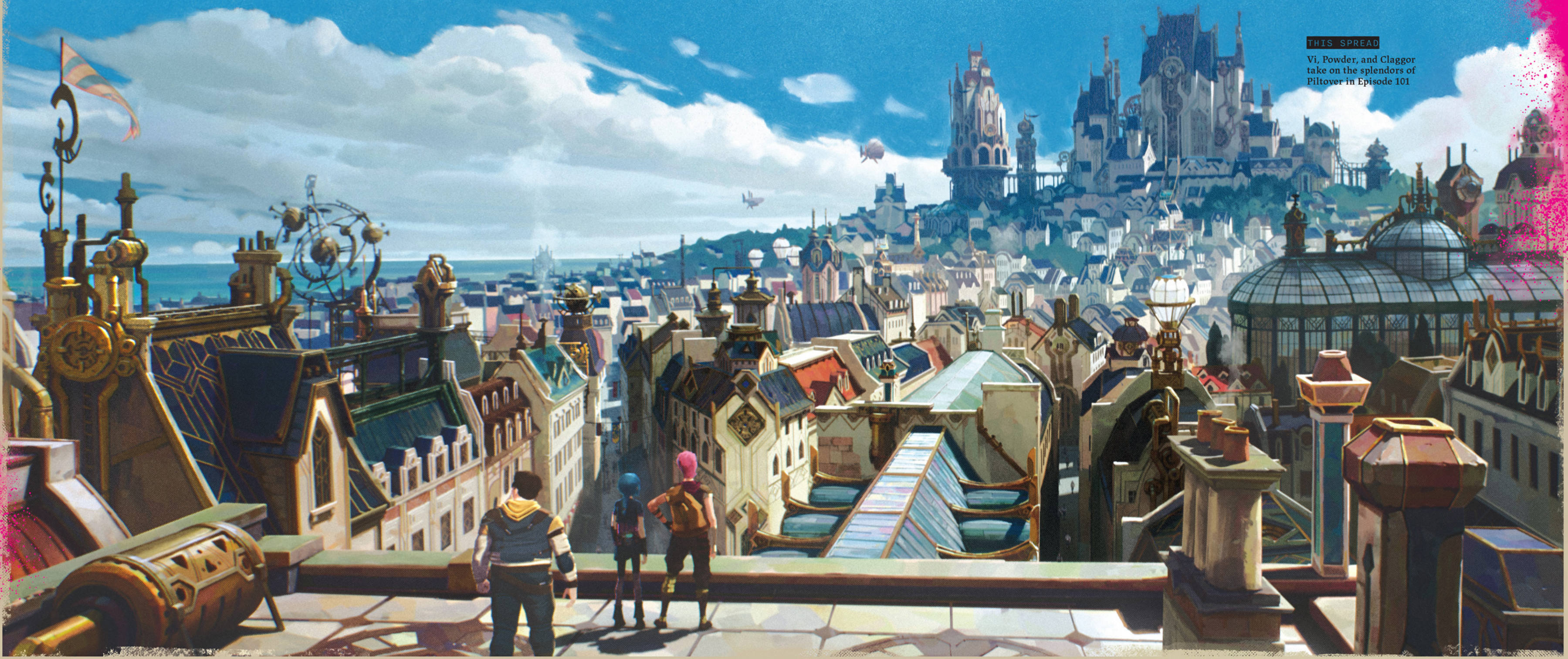
3

A CITADEL OF AMBITION AND INVENTION

THE WORLD OF *ARCANE* IS CENTERED ON THE DISSONANT halves of a greater whole: Piltover's topside and its undercity, which would become Zaun—at odds with each other, but also inextricably connected to each other. When you look closely, they are not entirely dissimilar despite their mutual distrust and historical conflicts. Piltover is the shining city on a hill dedicated to progress—a key component of its identity that allows it to bloom into a major trading center. In the script for Episode 101, Piltover is described as "a bright and sprawling city-state, home of the world's most gifted inventors—what 1800s Europe would look like if built by Nikola Tesla and Leonardo da Vinci."

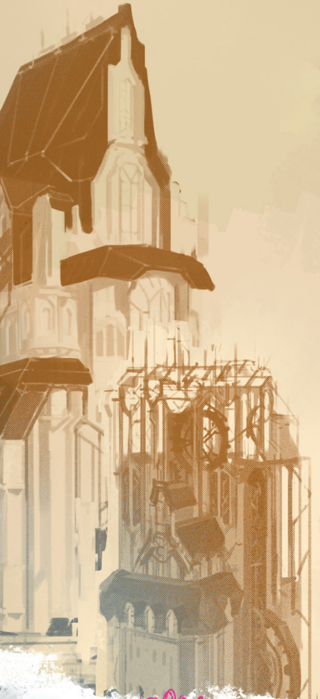
At first glance, Zaun looks like the exact opposite: It's subterranean, a little messy, and a little rogue. Hasty judgment might lead you to assume that this would create a basic dichotomy between those cities, but *Arcane* actually paints a complicated picture in which nobody is entirely good and nobody is entirely bad. Unlikely bridges and alliances form but also dissolve as the series's characters travel between the two cities (and sometimes between different planes of time and reality). A rebel from Zaun ends up working for the Enforcers in Piltover; good intentions turn out to have negative consequences; people who operate outside of the law have a positive impact on their surroundings.

Still, it's inarguable that the cities are different, and those differences have informed the way *Arcane* handles the settings, not only physically, in terms of pure design, but also through the language of film. "There was this implicit theme of duality because Piltover and Zaun are two regions in one, where they're literally one atop the other," Alex Yee said. "In terms of finding a way to make sense of or create cohesion within these 160 characters in the game, the regions are a big part of defining their core thematics. With Piltover and Zaun there is an idea of progress through science, with Piltover as a place where everything is heavily regulated, and through the regulation and the way people work, there's a lot of politics and a lot of classism. Zaun, conversely, is wild and unchecked, and dangerous. But at the same time, we always say, it's like a more pure meritocracy, because anything goes. That's sort of baked into



THIS SPREAD

Vi, Powder, and Claggor take on the splendors of Piltover in Episode 101



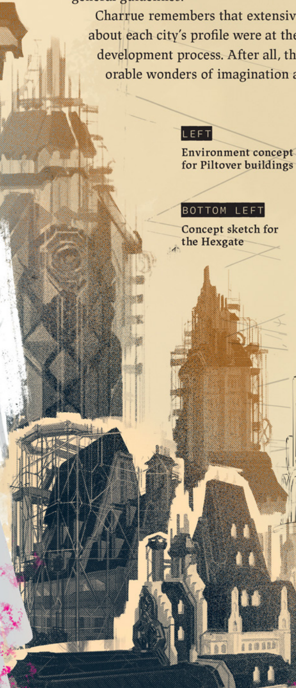
the theme of the sister cities and the sister characters. Right out of the gate, we were looking at these odd-couple pairings for characters and knowing that the act of moving across the border and looking at the pros and cons of either side was going to test the principles of the characters."

Screenwriter Amanda Overton concurred: "What was important to me, in terms of storytelling, was the contrast between Piltover and Zaun. We always said that the structure of this world is literally etched into the rock—the Piltover world literally crushes the Zaun world and that stratification of class is just etched into the stone."

"Canonically Zaun is supposed to be super-dark, oily, and dirty with green smoke everywhere," said Riot's Arnaud-Loris Baudry. "The team at Fortiche would be, like, 'Okay, but can we do something a bit different?' And sometimes it was just not looking like our I.P. Piltover was more about the design of everything, the symmetry, everything being really angled and imperfect. We're actually starting the story when our champions are younger, and the cities are not yet the ones that are canon. By the end of Season 2, Piltover and Zaun look just like the ones our fans know."

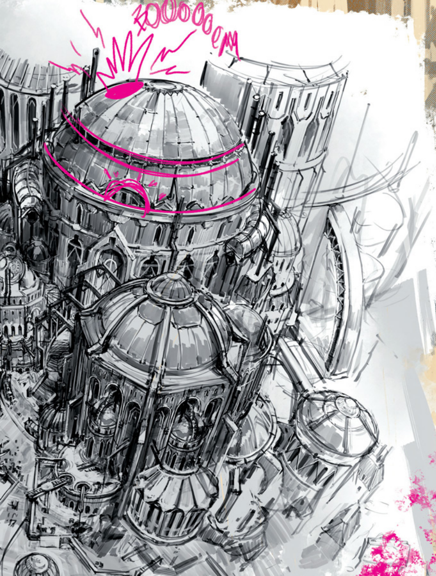
In an artistic and technical feat, the mise en scène varies according to where the action takes place, especially in Season 1. "For instance in Piltover the camera moves would be modeled after the city itself: It's a city that's straight, more Art Deco, so the camera moves as little as possible," Pascal Charrue said. "Whereas in Zaun, which is more a hodgepodge of styles—Art Nouveau, Gothic, a little industrial—there are more camera movements. We would deviate from these rules when a scene demanded it, but we did have those general guidelines."

Charrue remembers that extensive discussions about each city's profile were at the heart of the development process. After all, the most memorable wonders of imagination are built on a



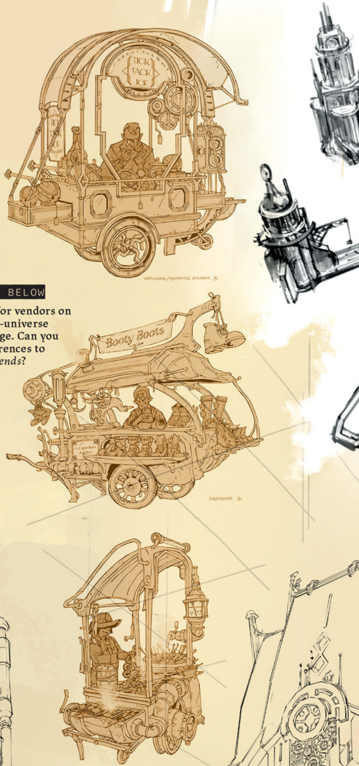
LEFT

Environment concept art for Piltover buildings



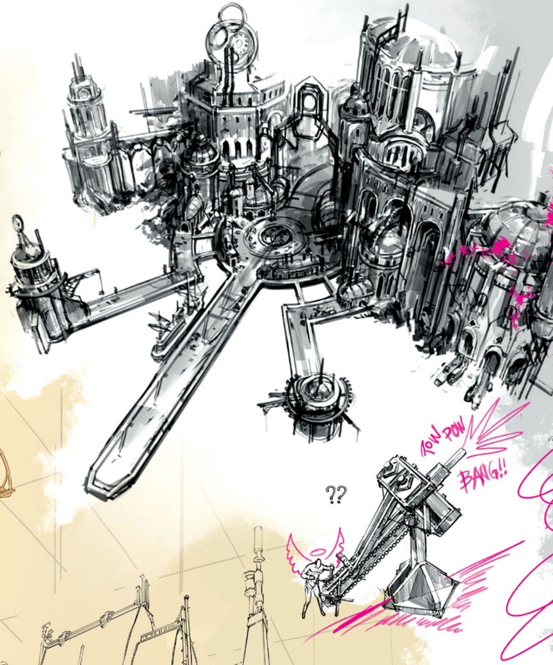
BOTTOM LEFT

Concept sketch for the Hexgate



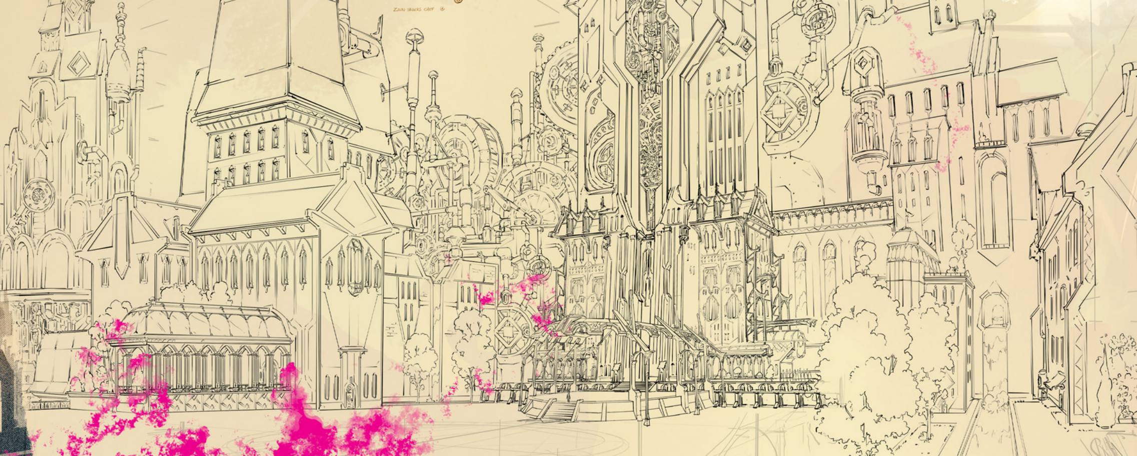
ABOVE AND BELOW

Concept art for vendors on the alternate-universe Piltover Bridge. Can you spot the references to *League of Legends*?



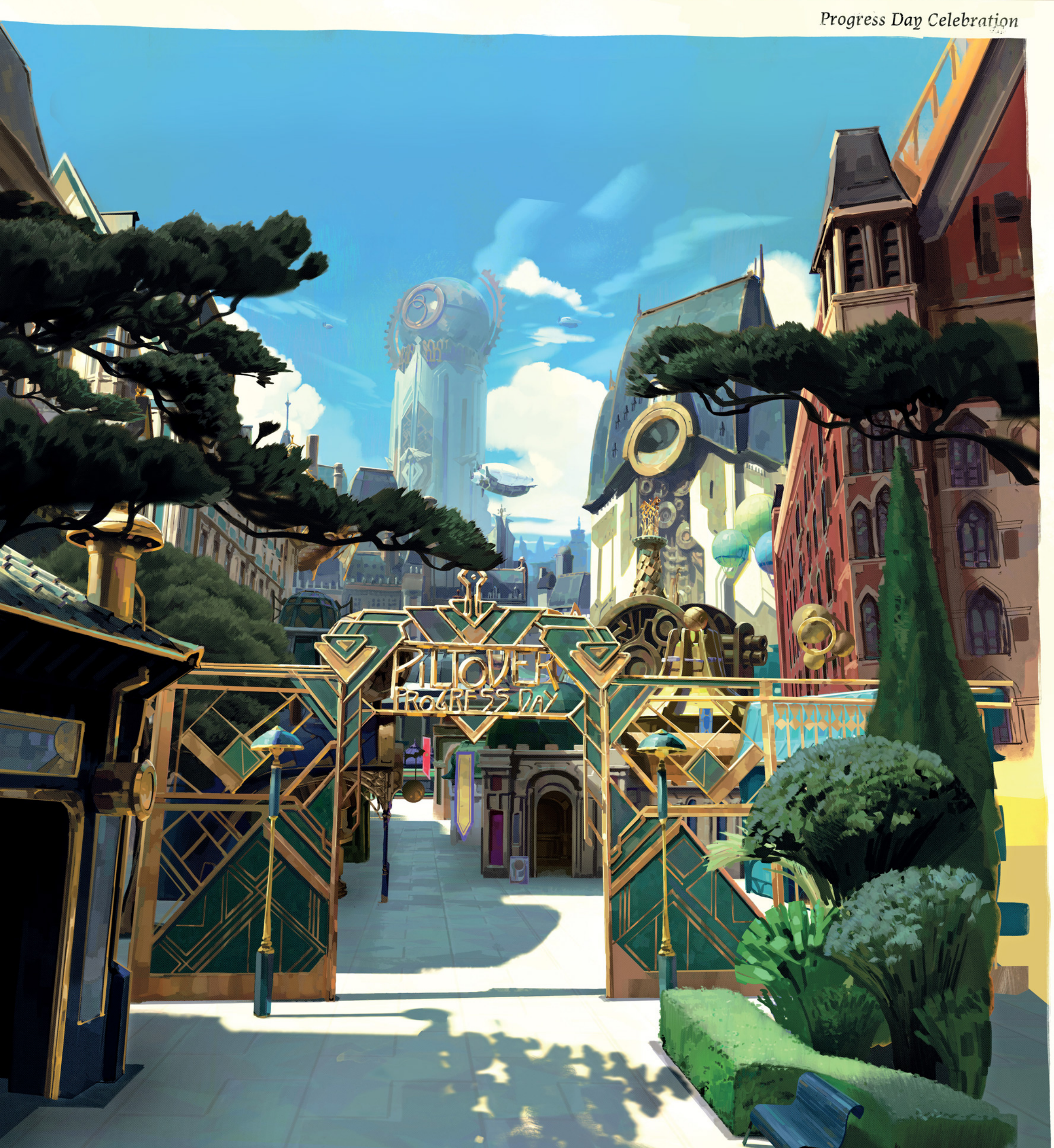
ABOVE

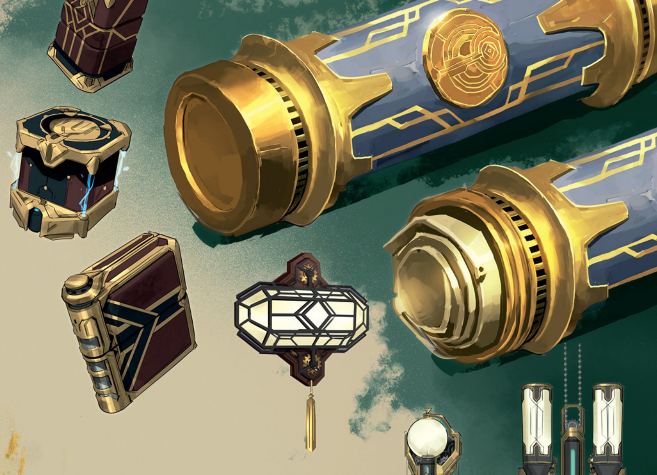
Concept art for the Hexgate



BELOW

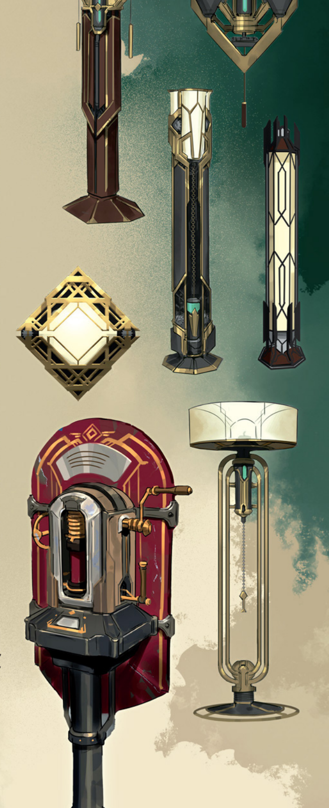
Concept sketch for Academy Square





solid foundation imbued with a coherent internal logic. "With Christian from the start we asked ourselves what differentiates these two cities," he said. Charrue went on to list some of the unseen properties and background that would define what ended up on screen: "Neither of them has big industry, there are no big factories. There's a great architect in Piltover who gets commissions but it's not industrialized, everything is made with hand-cut stone. Zaun is a mishmash, it's recycled. There's a good jeweler so you have someone who's going to create a decor that's a little Gothic with its own identity."

Decisions about everything from the layout of the city to the way its streets and buildings look were built on extensive prep work about the very structure of the society. Arnaud-Loris Baudry said the designers asked themselves fundamental questions about Piltover, like how it's ruled, for example. "I know that it's a city made by scientists who were trying to escape the fallout of magic warfare in Runeterra," he said. "We had a brainstorm session where we decided that there should be a council. Maybe they are not politicians, maybe they are just representatives of guilds and stuff like that. I knew from the worldbuilding document that the city is also supposed to be the biggest hub for trades in Runeterra. There is so much wealth in Piltover that they must have some money to invest in science, as if it was art. With Christian and the directors at Fortiche, we like to take examples

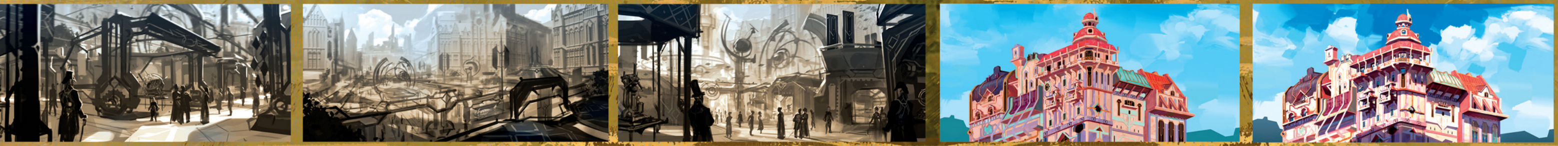


LEFT

Matte painting of Progress Day entrance

RIGHT, FROM TOP

Explorations for Art Deco–inspired puzzle box, book, messenger capsules, lamps, and post stations



from real life, like the Medicis or the Renaissance. I think the Council is a good example because I wasn't in charge of the environment, which was [handled by] another artist in Los Angeles, and I was telling him that maybe the Council could transform, and actually the walls could close like a vault because at the end of the show we knew there would be a big uprising of the undercity. So I was thinking that maybe it could be like a safe place, like a panic room, basically. We created a whole system so that they can watch what's happening in the city."

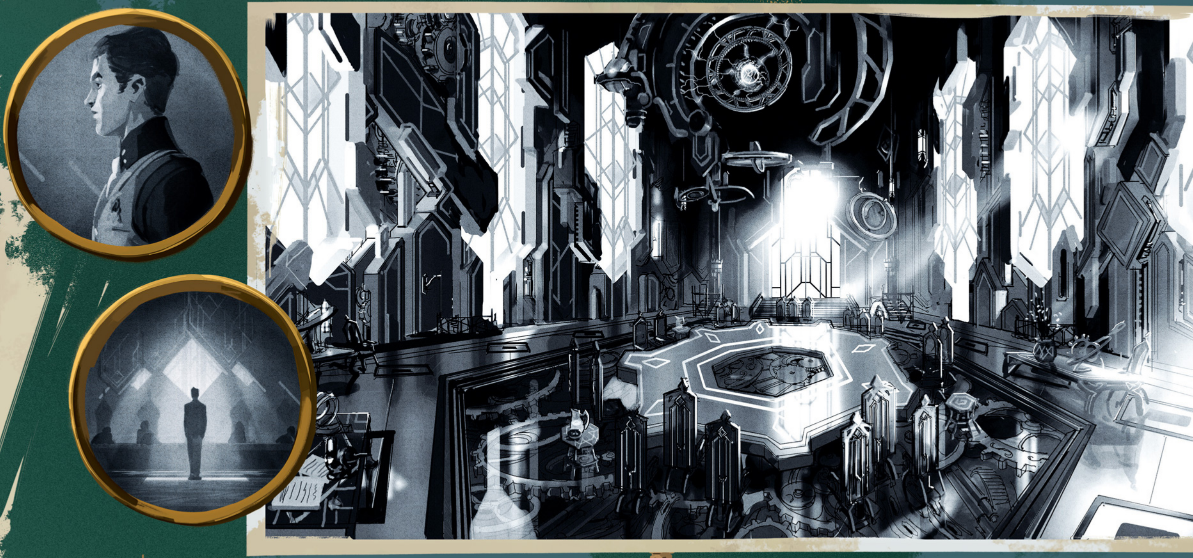
Another reference came from places one might encounter simply walking the streets of our own world. "I was inspired by the Institut du Monde Arabe in Paris, where you have these *mashrabiyas* to filter the sun," Baudry said, referring to screens that are used in buildings in the Arabic world. "We needed to create another place where Jayce would be in prison or in a trial. We were like, 'Maybe it's the same place but it transforms and he has his trial in the middle of the Council, with just this ray of light on top of him. Which by the way, was a reference to Richard Donner's *Superman*, where there is a trial and you only have a ray of light on the characters."

`TOP ROW`

Environment explorations for Progress Day exhibits and Piltover balconies

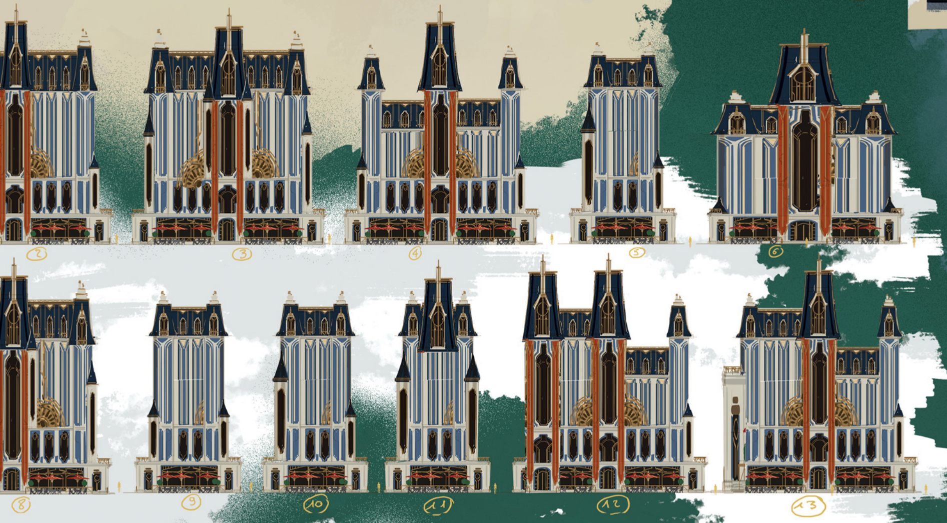
`BELOW`

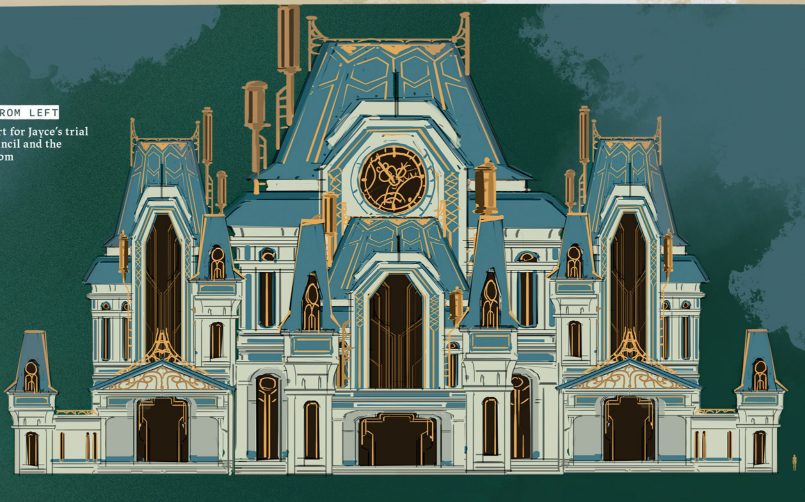
Facades of Piltover buildings

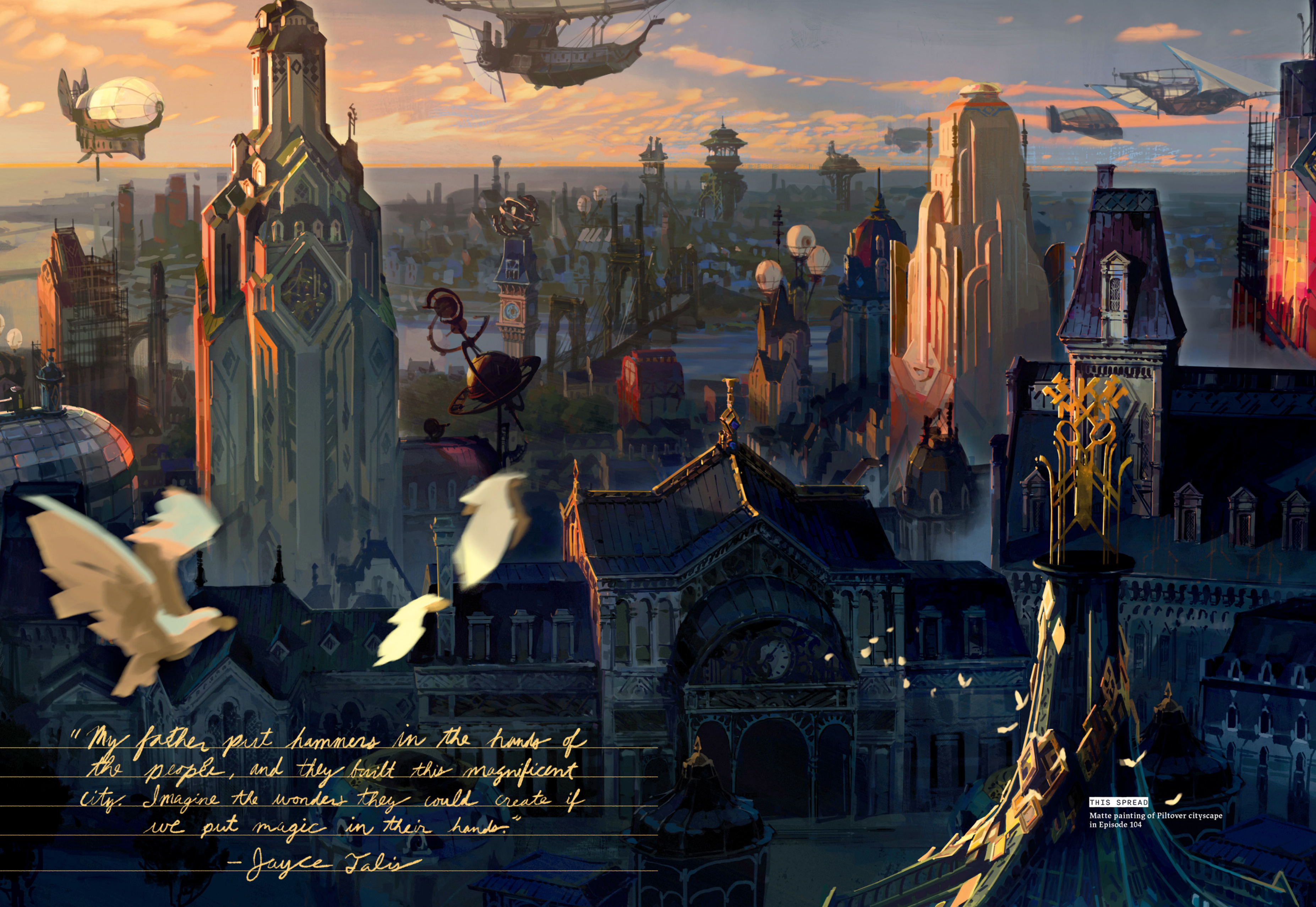


`ABOVE, FROM LEFT`

Concept art for Jayce's trial by the Council and the council room







"My father put hammers in the hands of the people, and they built this magnificent city. Imagine the wonders they could create if we put magic in their hands."

— Jayce Talis

THIS SPREAD

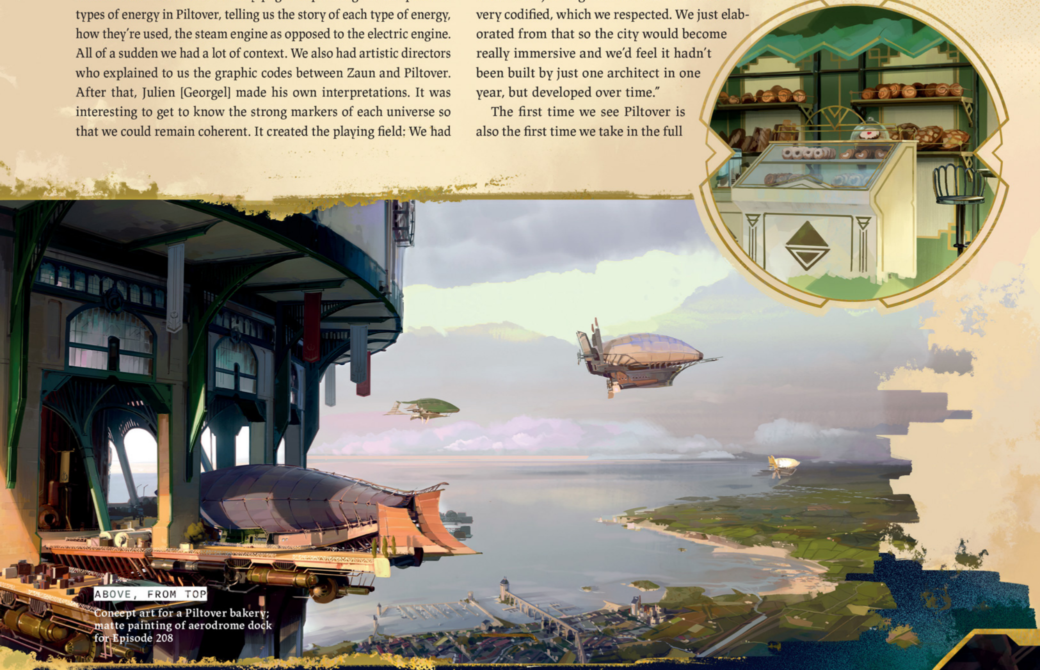
Matte painting of Piltover cityscape in Episode 104

THE GRAND METROPOLIS

WHEN IT CAME TIME FOR PILTOVER TO GO FROM ITS GAME version to *Arcane*, Riot had plenty of material on hand. Producer Hervé Dupont recalls that there was background information for pretty much everything. "Sometimes they'd send documents along the lines of 'We have a team that made a bible on the means of propulsion in Piltover'—and we'd get a sixty-page bible on the various types of energy in Piltover, how the vehicles work, etc.," he said. "They sent it because we asked questions. Sometimes they indicated that there are hot air balloons, how the hot air balloons work, and so on. What is hextech? What were the means of propulsion before hextech? Someone sent us fifty pages explaining all the possible types of energy in Piltover, telling us the story of each type of energy, how they're used, the steam engine as opposed to the electric engine. All of a sudden we had a lot of context. We also had artistic directors who explained to us the graphic codes between Zaun and Piltover. After that, Julien [Georgel] made his own interpretations. It was interesting to get to know the strong markers of each universe so that we could remain coherent. It created the playing field: We had the four posts at each corner of the sandpit and we knew how big the sandpit was for the graphic creation."

League of Legends uses an isometric perspective, which leaves room for the players' imagination while being remarkably effective in terms of gameplay. When it came to translating the action to a series, that relatively restricted perspective empowered Fortiche. "In terms of sets, they show them even less than the environments, so we had a good deal of freedom," art director Julien Georgel said. "When they did show sets in the game, they had to make them pretty stylized so people could get a sense of them with just a glance. So Piltover and Zaun were very codified, which we respected. We just elaborated from that so the city would become really immersive and we'd feel it hadn't been built by just one architect in one year, but developed over time."

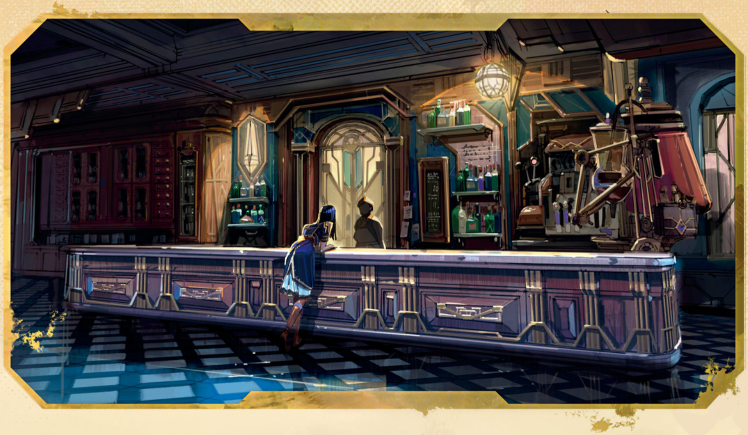
The first time we see Piltover is also the first time we take in the full



ABOVE, FROM TOP

Concept art for a Piltover bakery; matte painting of aerodrome dock for Episode 208

"The city would become really immersive and we'd feel it hadn't been built by just one architect in one year, but developed over time."



ABOVE

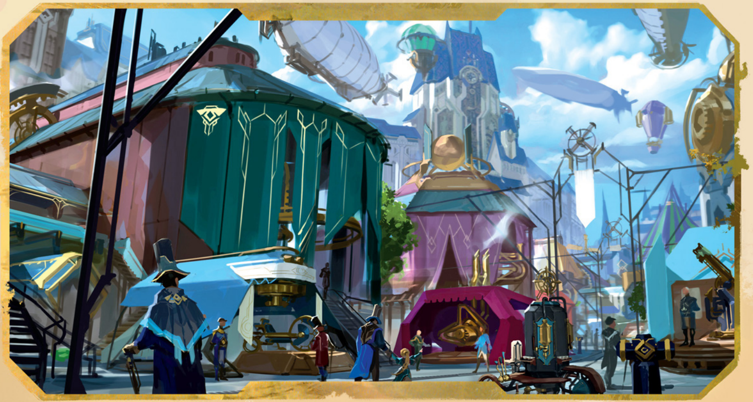
Environment concept for a Piltover café

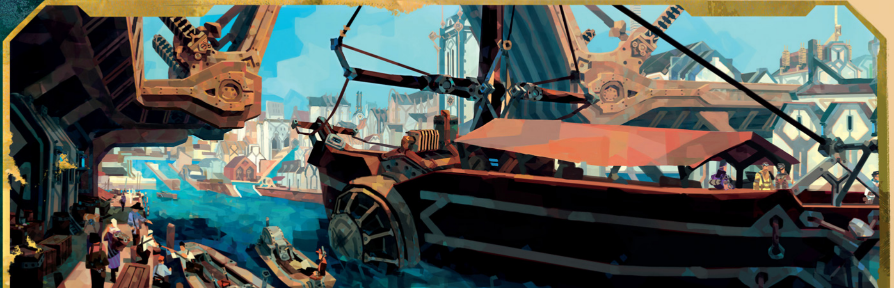
BELOW

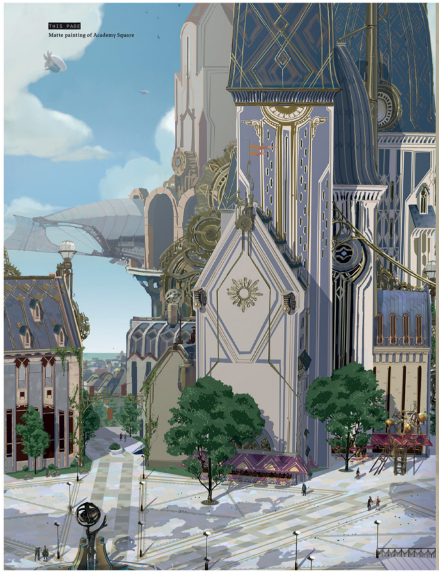
Environment concept for Progress Day fair

BOTTOM

Environment concept for Piltover docks







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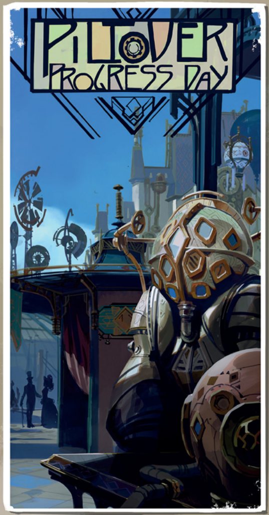
Matte painting of Academy Square


PILTOVER
PROGRESS DAY

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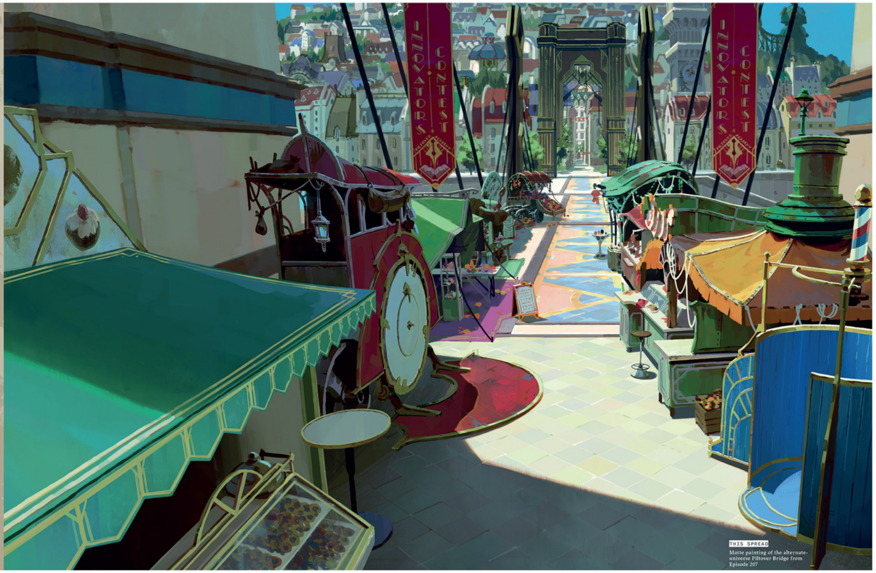
Poster for Piltover's Progress Day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INNOVATORS CONTEST

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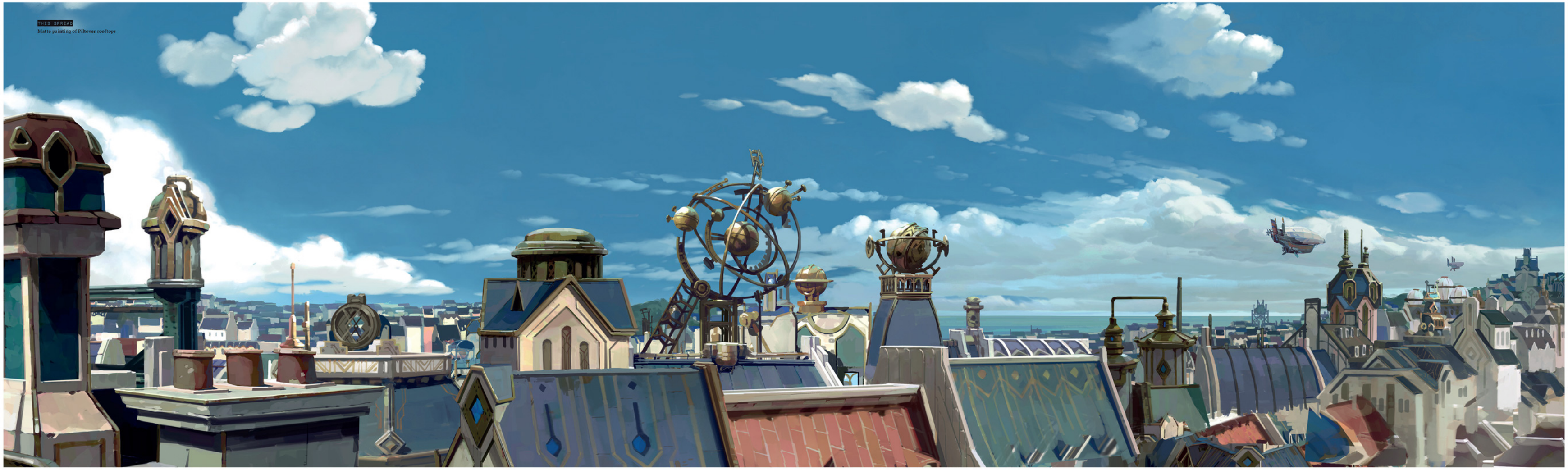
Matte painting of the alternate-universe Piltover Bridge from Episode 207



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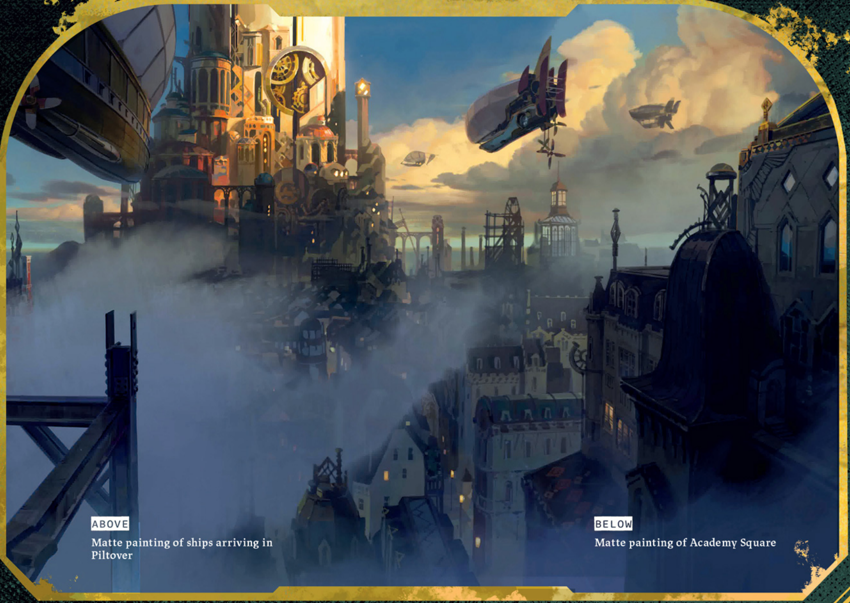
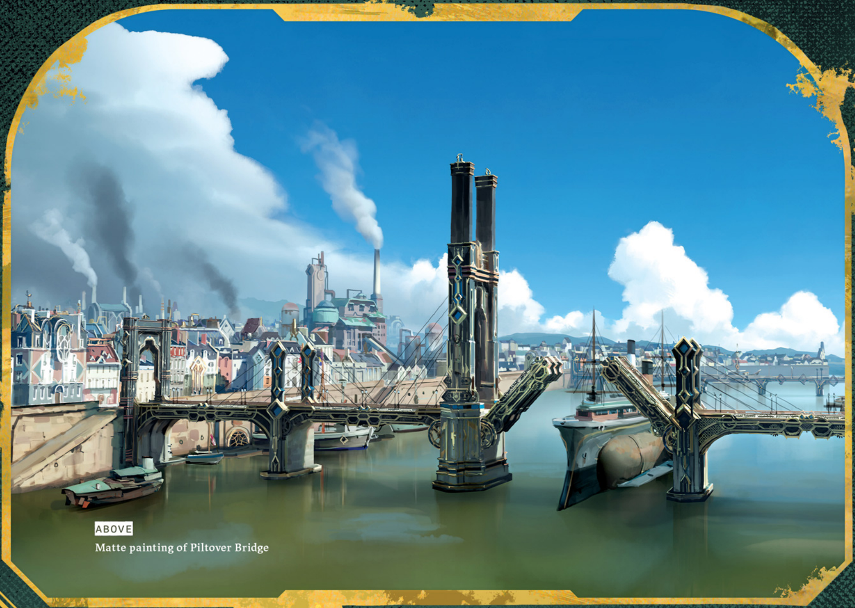
Matte painting of Piltover rooftops

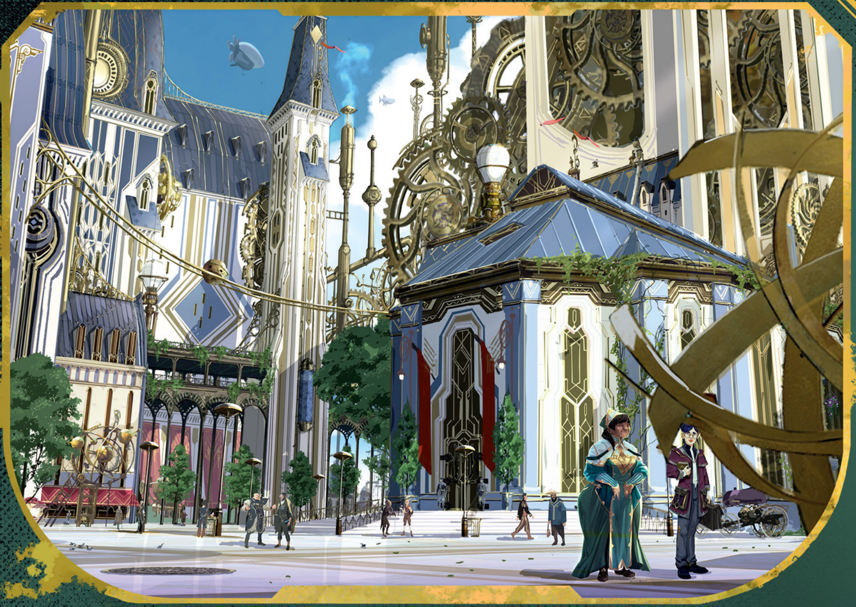


ABOVE
Matte painting of ships arriving in Piltover

BELOW
Matte painting of Academy Square



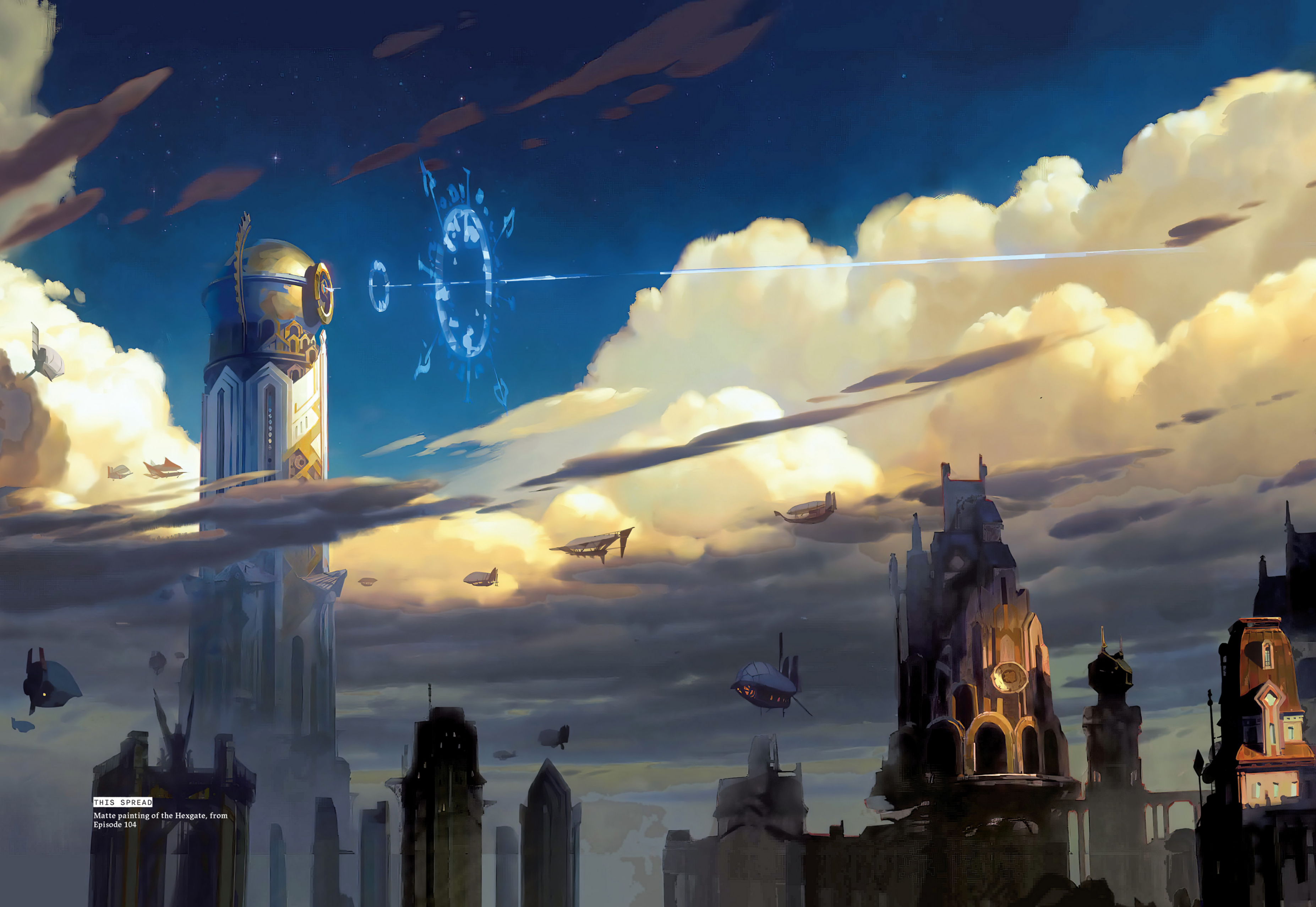
ABOVE
Matte painting of Piltover Bridge



splendor of the city. It happens very early in Episode 101, and we discover that urban landscape through the eyes of a group of Zaun kids led by Vi, out for an illicit heist in unfriendly territory. As the camera pans over, we discover an urban landscape somewhere between the painterly masterpieces of Studio Ghibli and the classic covers of Jules Verne novels. "There's a lot of that," Georgel agreed. "Even though we are in another world, it does bear traces of steampunk so a lot of inspiration comes from the period between the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century. We also went back much earlier, sometimes to the Renaissance. Some buildings were inspired by the Château de Chambord, things like that, to give the impression that the city has a history," Georgel elaborated, referring to a majestic French castle in the Loire Valley. "Piltover is meant to have been founded about two hundred years before the series takes place, so with that in mind we brought in Art Deco, fantasy, some stuff we made up."

In addition, Piltover is growing, imparting it with a dynamism that had to be visually suggested. "We were actually inspired by New York for Episode 104, when we fast-forward about ten years and discover the new Piltover, after the Hexgate," Georgel said. "We have workers on scaffolds, it's clearly winking to those famous photos of New York City skyscrapers being erected, the steam coming out and all that. That speaks to people, consciously or not: The city is in the process of being built out rather than already drastically changed. Riot thought it was a little too much like New York so we pulled back—and they were right. I forgot to mention a few images from François Schuiten and *The Obscure Cities*," Georgel added. "Obviously we had images by him in mind for that particular moment, all the aerial stuff for example." He was referring to a classic series of French-Belgian graphic novels illustrated by Schuiten and written by Benoît Peeters. The first volume came out in 1983, and the books are set in a poetic retrofuturist parallel world whose cities seamlessly integrate Art Nouveau, Modernism, and Art Deco. The soaring buildings often create aerial canyons crisscrossed by imposing flying ships that can dock at skyscrapers. *The Obscure Cities* project has been wildly influential on European artists, and it's no surprise to see it acknowledged as an influence on Piltover.

Both the worldbuilding that is barely visible in the show and what actually makes it to the screen were painstakingly detailed. "We could have done the city in 3-D, and actually, I had a clear idea of everything in my head," Baudry said. "We wanted to exaggerate everything so that the city feels alive and that you can get lost in it. So for example when you're really far away from the big building in the Academy Square, it is actually gigantic. When you're closer to it, we scale everything so that it fits better but it always feels really big and you don't know if it's a hundred stories or a thousand. We needed to have a few landmarks, like the bridge, so that it doesn't feel too cartoony."



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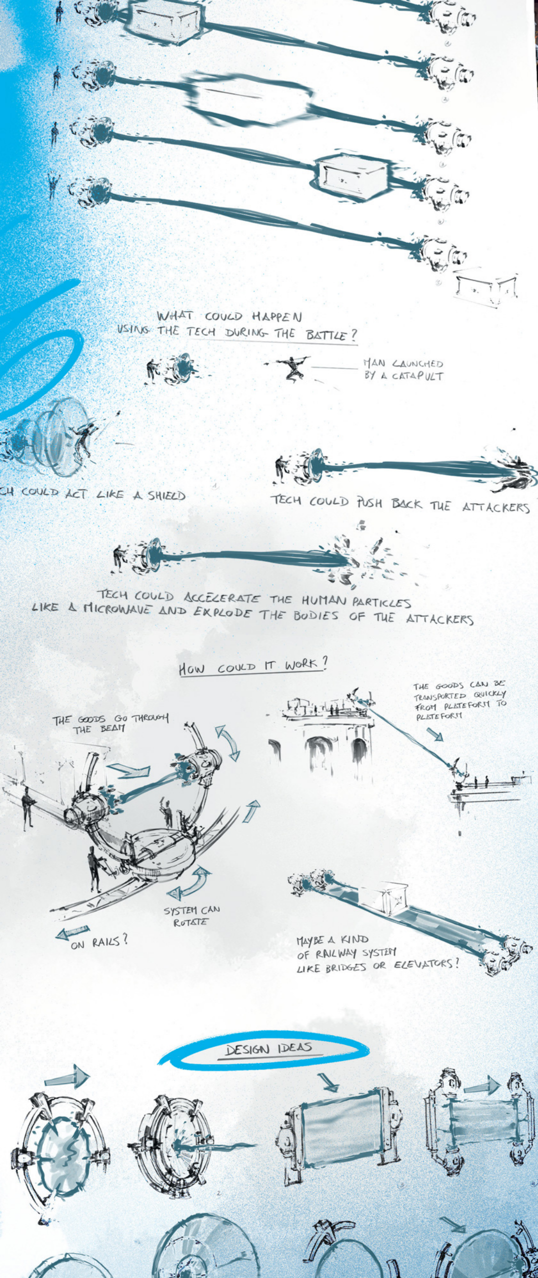
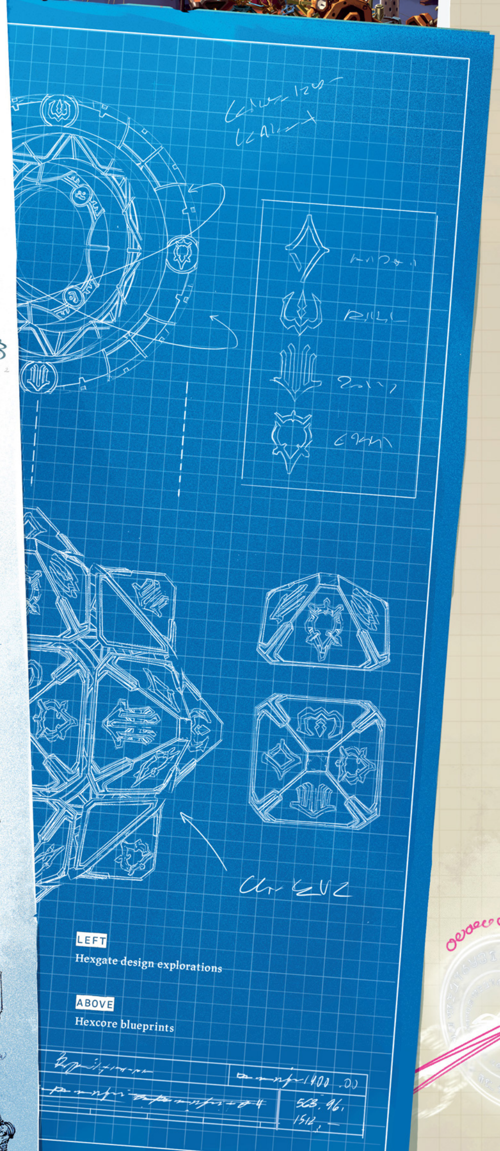
Matte painting of the Hexgate, from Episode 104


WHAT COULD HAPPEN USING THE TECH DURING THE BATTLE?
MAN LAUNCHED BY A CATAPULT
CH COULD ACT LIKE A SHIELD
TECH COULD PUSH BACK THE ATTACKERS
TECH COULD ACCELERATE THE HUMAN PARTICLES LIKE A MICROWAVE AND EXPLODE THE BODIES OF THE ATTACKERS
HOW COULD IT WORK?
THE GOODS GO THROUGH THE BEAM
THE GOODS CAN BE TRANSPORTED QUICKLY FROM PLATEFORM TO PLATEFORM
SYSTEM CAN ROTATE
ON RAILS?
MAYBE A KIND OF RAILWAY SYSTEM LIKE BRIDGES OR ELEVATORS?
DESIGN IDEAS



LEFT

Hexgate design explorations

ABOVE

Hexcore blueprints

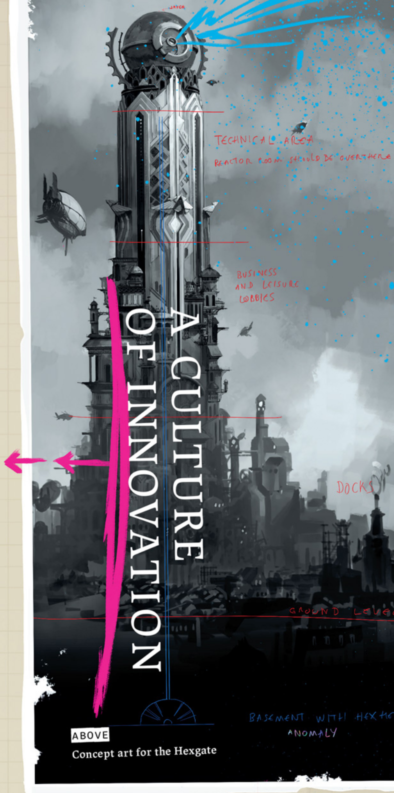
A CULTURE OF INNOVATION

BOTH PILTOVER AND ZAUN RELY ON INVENTION, BUT IN different ways—more controlled and codified in Piltover, more improvisational and volatile in Zaun. The Piltover take on the realm of invention is most visibly illustrated with Heimerdinger's office, Jayce and Viktor's lab, and the Academy.

"We searched for a long time for what the Academy's column would look like," Julien Georgel said. "It was hard at first. We had a lot of back and forths about it because it looked too much like it was out of Sleeping Beauty's castle or something, very shiny and all."

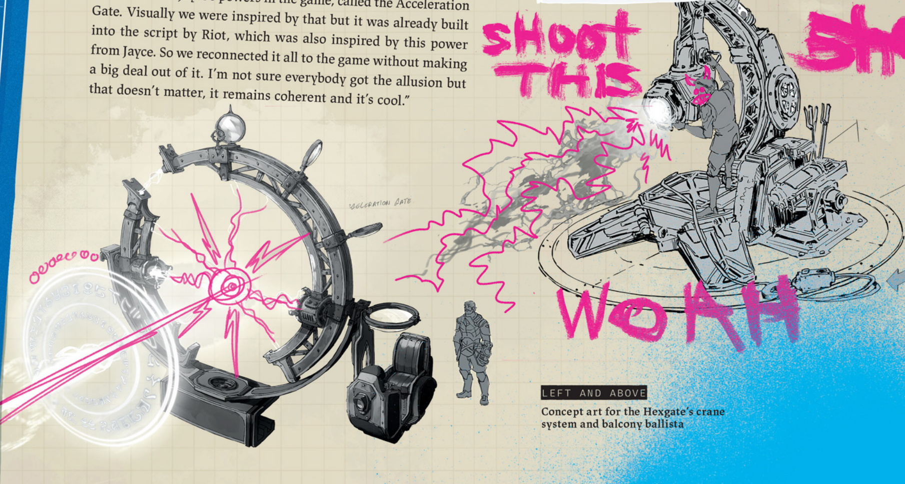
As part of the continuity, the writers and designers had to ensure that new additions to the Piltover skyline could have actually been erected in the few years that have lapsed between Episodes 103 and 104. One of the toughest things in a movie or series is to economically suggest that time has passed, and in this particular case, the trick was to also show that, in essence, the equivalent of the industrial revolution had taken place in the intervening years. This caused some major head-scratching. "We were talking for a very long time about making the Hexgate because it has to be built during this time period," Arnaud-Loris Baudry said. "It's kind of crazy when you think about how the city was transformed."

Naturally, inventions connect to both the city and the characters. Georgel suggests that the Hexgate partly relates to Jayce's darker side, his ambition and his sometimes lofty ideas (as usual with *Arcane*, those are exactly the kind of ambivalent traits that make heroes more complicated, and thus more interesting, than they might appear at first glance). "For the Hexgate shape, I was inspired by the Piltover logo, which is a dented wheel with a circle inside, with two arms—that's the shape at the top of the Hexgate," Georgel said. "There was even a vertical bar underneath because it was inspired by that. The important thing is that it was conceived by Jayce. The basic design we came up with was kind of magic circles that are a bit like a spring, which is pretty close to one of Jayce's powers in the game, called the Acceleration Gate. Visually we were inspired by that but it was already built into the script by Riot, which was also inspired by this power from Jayce. So we reconnected it all to the game without making a big deal out of it. I'm not sure everybody got the allusion but that doesn't matter, it remains coherent and it's cool."


JAYCE
TECHNICAL AREA
REACTOR ROOM SHOULD BE OVERTHERE
BUSINESS AND LEISURE LOBBIES
DOCKS
GROUND LEVE
BASEMENT WITH HEX HE
ANOMALY

ABOVE

Concept art for the Hexgate


SHOOT THIS
SH
ACCELERATION GATE
WOAH

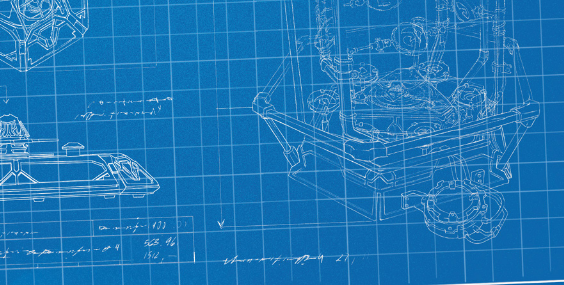
LEFT AND ABOVE

Concept art for the Hexgate's crane system and balcony ballista

HEXTECH & THE HEXCORE

BEHIND THE POWER OF PILTOVER IS THE MAGIC of science—or perhaps, the science of magic. The world of *Arcane* is filled with wondrous inventions ranging from hextech and shimmer to the Hexgate, and weapons like Jayce's Mercury Hammer. Some were new to *Arcane*, but most can trace their origins back to *League of Legends*. "When it comes to hextech and shimmer, hextech has just been a metaphor for magical weaponry," said Paul Bellezza, director of creative game production at *League of Legends* studios. "We have many characters who use hextech weapons. It's a known entity in the game. If you're a player who wants to know more, you can go and read the backstory. Shimmer was for the show, but thirteen years ago, we used to do a newsletter for our audience, *The Journal of Justice*, about what's happening with our characters in earlier versions of the story. Shimmer was a subplot between Zaun and Piltover and other countries in our I.P. as a substance that would corrupt things, and we abandoned that stuff." *Arcane* was only happy to pick it right back up. Maybe, as Bellezza confided, because Alex Yee used to write for *The Journal of Justice*.

What matters is the general sense of marvel at something new and the sense that the harnessing of those strange new powers changes a society, just like changes in science and technology do in our own world. "It's leveling the playing field and giving non-magic people the ability to wield magic," sound designer Brad Beaumont said. "Throughout the *League of Legends* story, there are people that are inherently magic, people who can wield magic on their own. Then there's this dream that Jayce has to put magic in the hands of the people, like, 'How can we actually democratize magic?' The show really showcases the beginning of that—the beginnings of hextech magic. It starts with these core, simple tonal elements of magic and rudimentary, almost steampunk mechanisms. Then as we get through Season 1, it gets more and more developed and more and more advanced, clean, and refined. We even see that continue through Season 2."



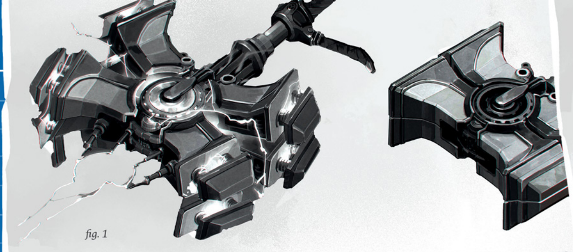


fig. 1

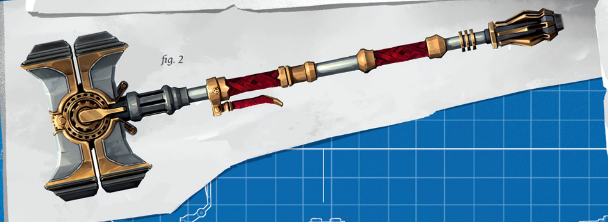


fig. 2

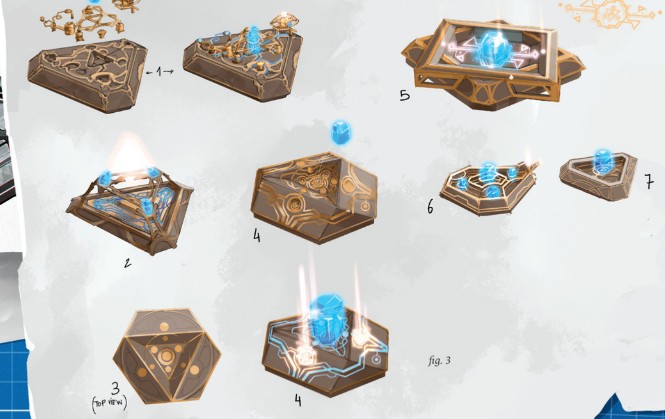


fig. 3

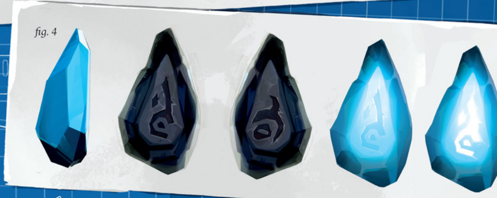


fig. 4

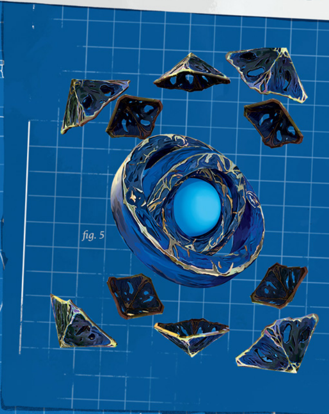


fig. 5

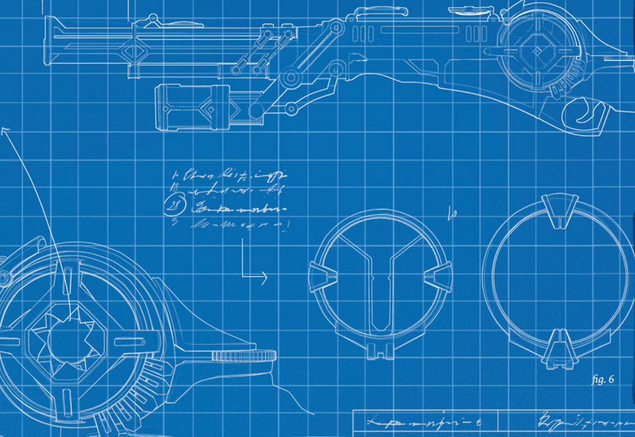


fig. 6

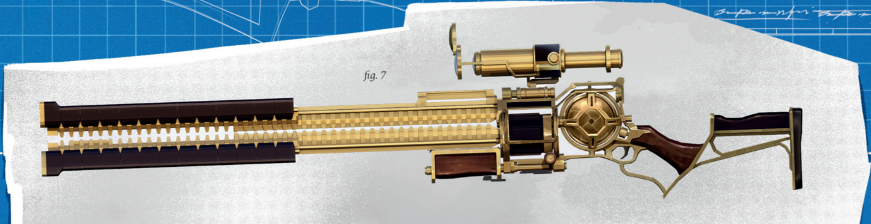


fig. 7

ABOVE

Concept art for Jayce's Mercury Hammer

LEFT

Blueprint for the hextech cage

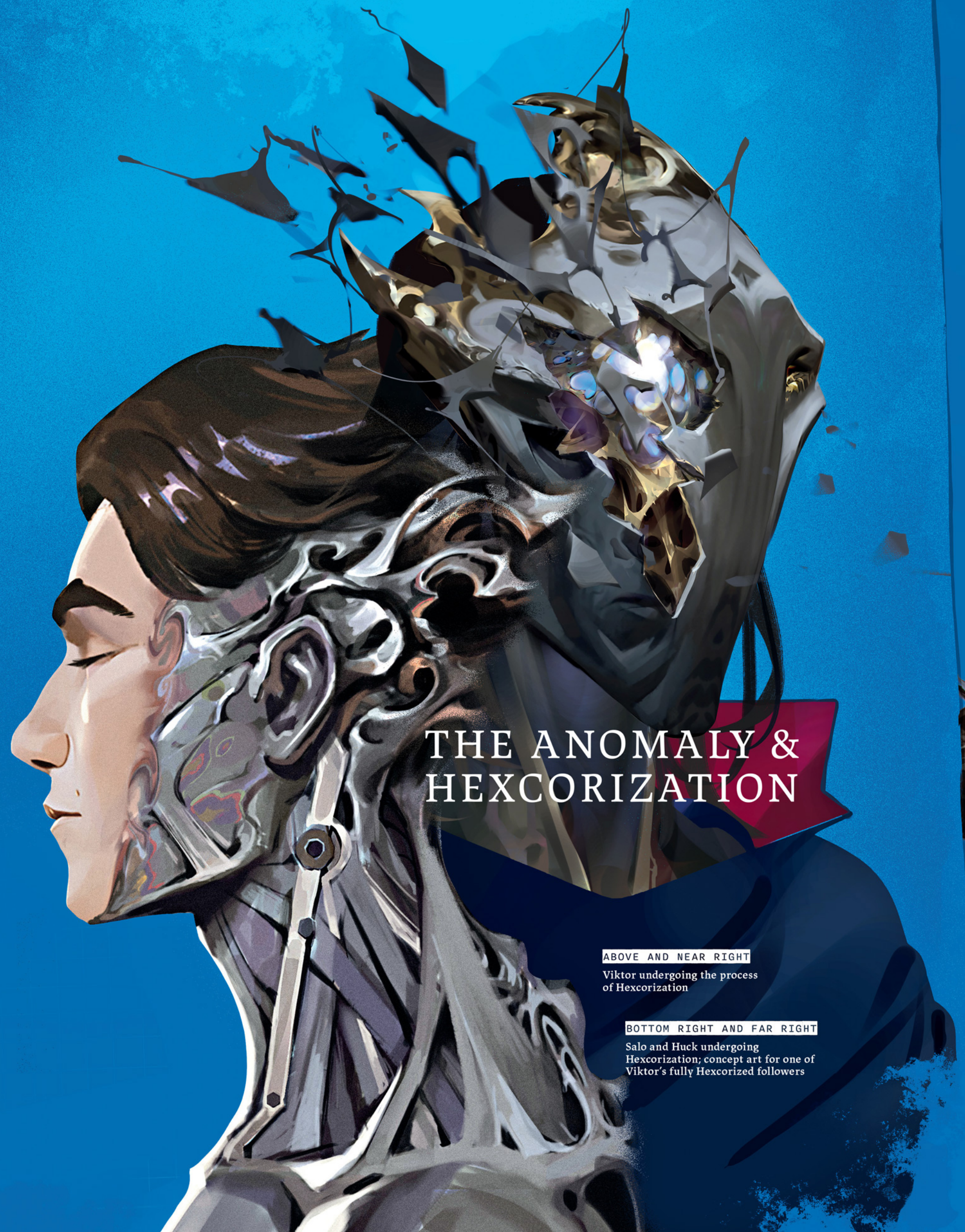
RIGHT, FROM TOP

Concept art for hextech circuit board, unrefined Hexite Crystal, and the insides of a Hexcore

BACKGROUND AND BOTTOM

Blueprint and concept art for Caitlyn's hextech rifle

THE ANOMALY & HEXCORIZATION



ABOVE AND NEAR RIGHT

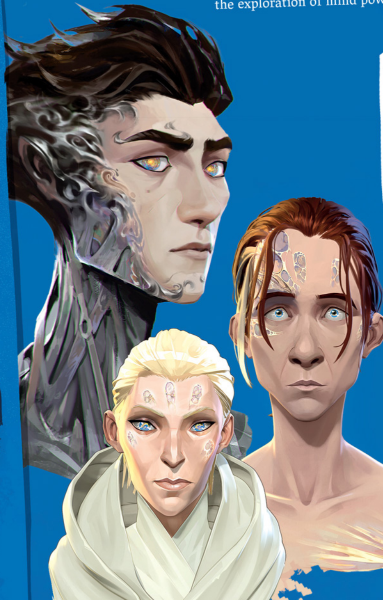
Viktor undergoing the process of Hexcorization

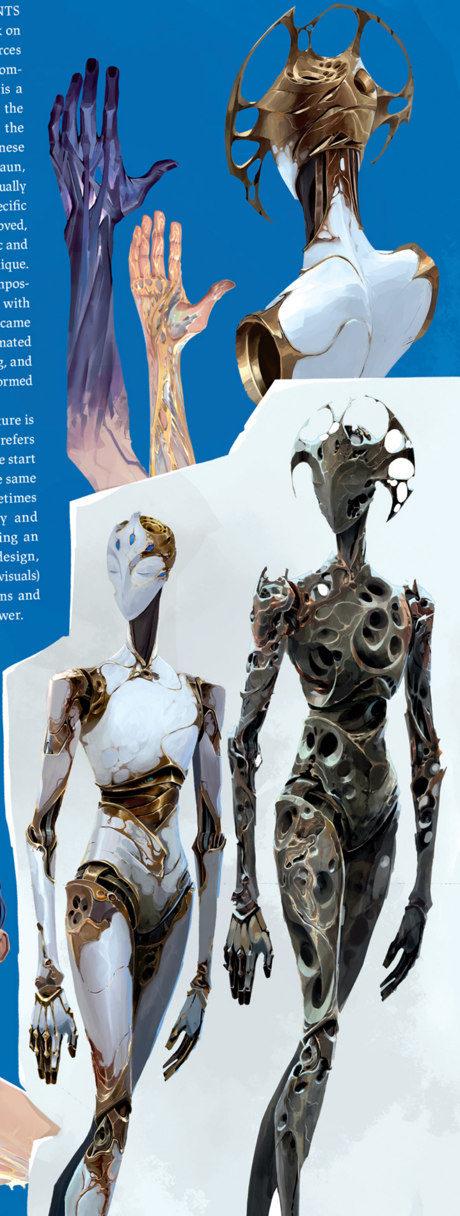
BOTTOM RIGHT AND FAR RIGHT

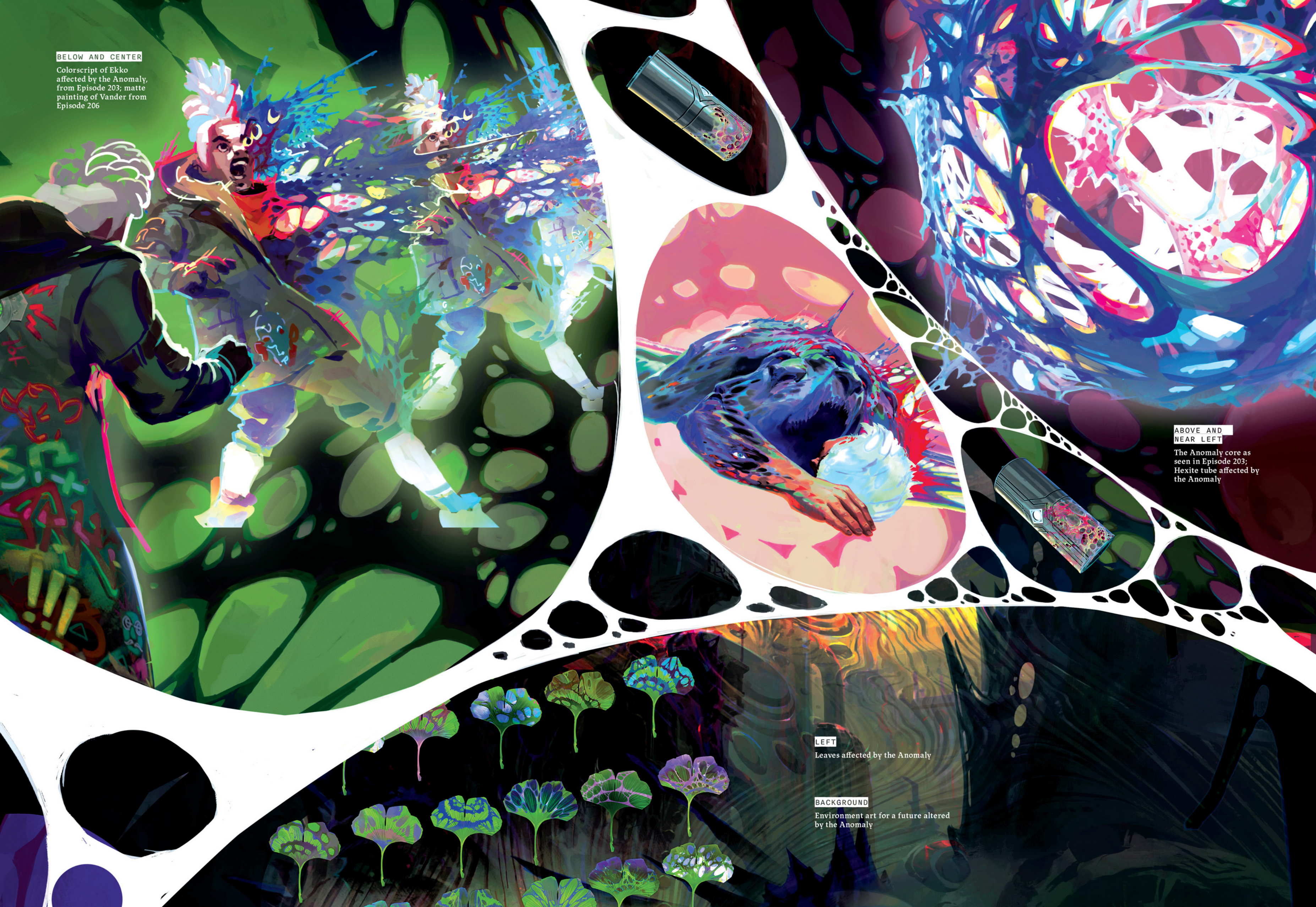
Salo and Huck undergoing Hexcorization; concept art for one of Viktor's fully Hexcorized followers

THE ANOMALY AND HEXCORIZATION ARE MAJOR EVENTS in Season 2, and they involved a lot of inventive design work on the Riot and Fortiche sides. As usual, Fortiche drew from sources that might have looked far-fetched but ended up looking completely natural in their new context. Gold, for example, is a recurring motif in both of those events, and for its use in the show's design, Anne-Laure To, from Fortiche, brings up the influence of *kintsugi*, which is a repair technique in Japanese ceramics. How could that possibly figure into Piltover or Zaun, which are technically not related to Japan? The connection actually comes from the very concept of *kintsugi* rather than from specific pieces. "Legend has it that an emperor broke a bowl that he loved, probably from an earlier dynasty, and that had great artistic and monetary value," To said, recounting the origins of the technique. "He asked several artists to repair it and they said it was impossible. An artisan came in with the idea to fill the cracks with gold, to emphasize the cracks themselves. So the object became even more valuable because the new technique had sublimated the cracks. It's visually striking but it's also full of meaning, and it was interesting to us because some characters might be deformed in some way, which impacts the way they move."

The idea of a repair that actually alters something's nature is especially poignant in the case of Hexcorization, which refers to the way Viktor's life is somehow saved by Hexcore at the start of Season 2, while being irremediably changed by it at the same time—*Arcane* is, in part, about trying things out, sometimes with little idea of the consequences. The Anomaly and Hexcorization are examples of Riot and Fortiche setting an almost experimental course in both storytelling and design, incorporating classic science-fiction themes (and visuals) such as biomechanical mutations and the exploration of mind power.







BELOW AND CENTER

Colorscript of Ekko affected by the Anomaly, from Episode 203; matte painting of Vander from Episode 206

ABOVE AND NEAR LEFT

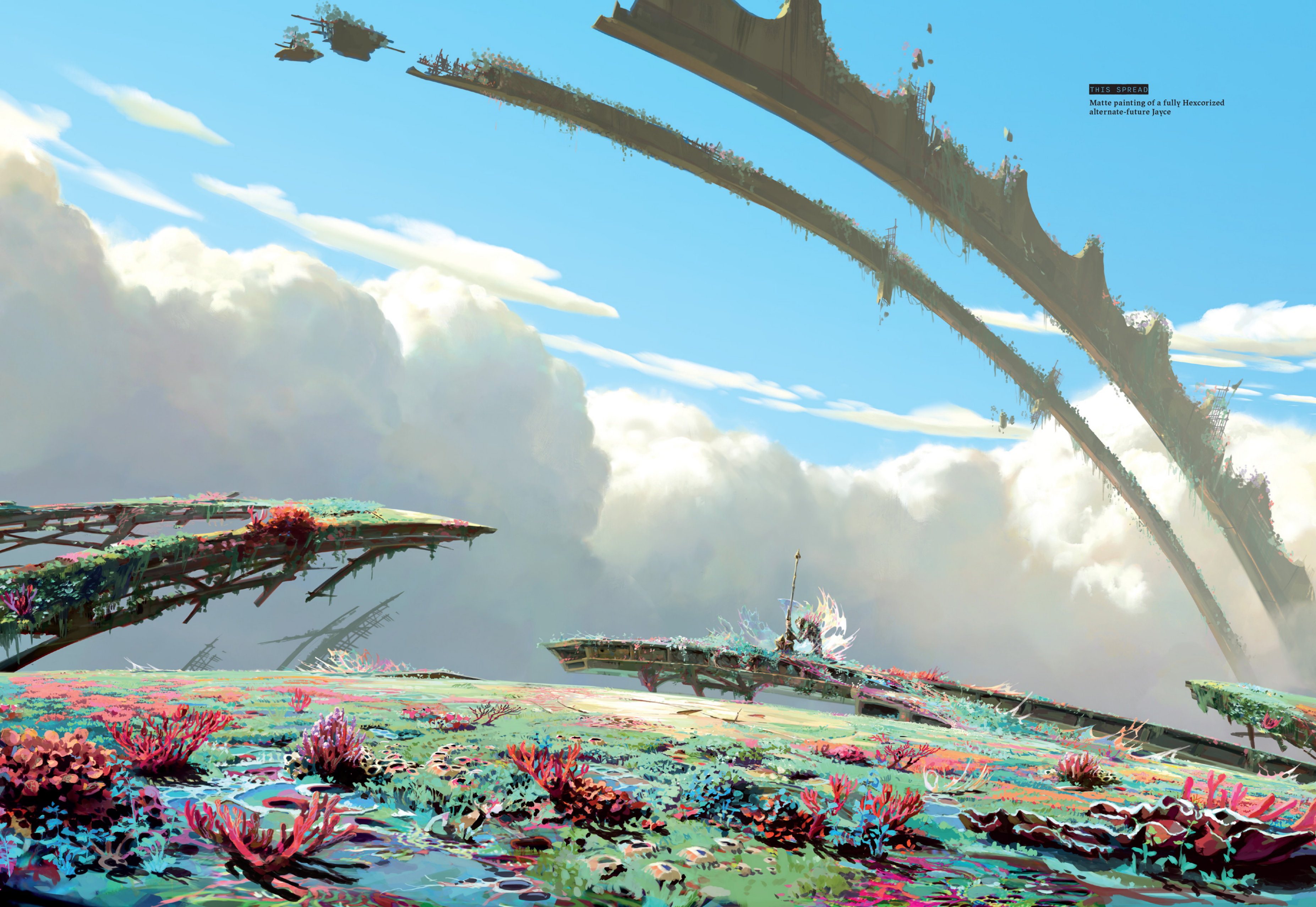
The Anomaly core as seen in Episode 203; Hexite tube affected by the Anomaly

LEFT

Leaves affected by the Anomaly

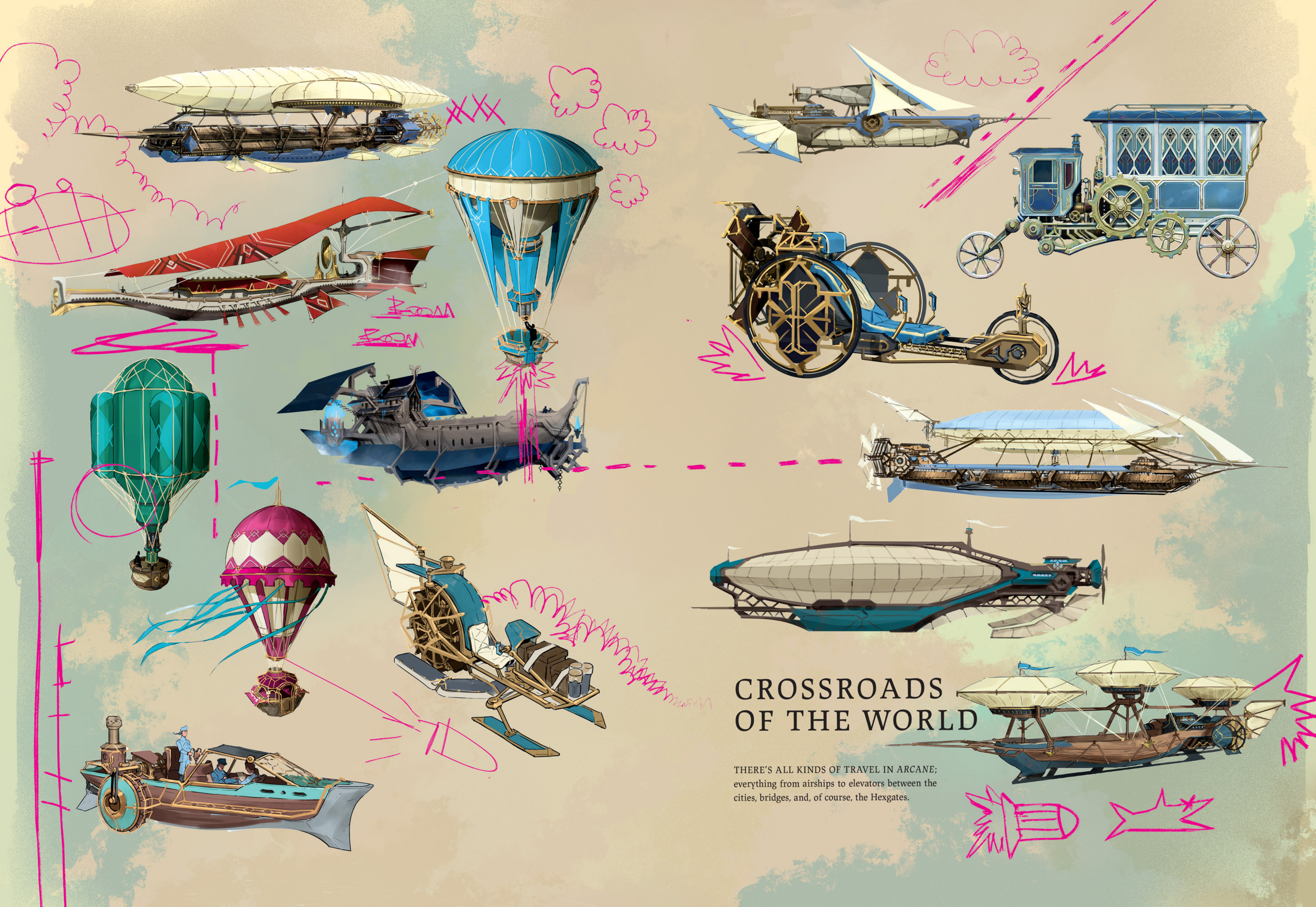
BACKGROUND

Environment art for a future altered by the Anomaly



THIS SPREAD

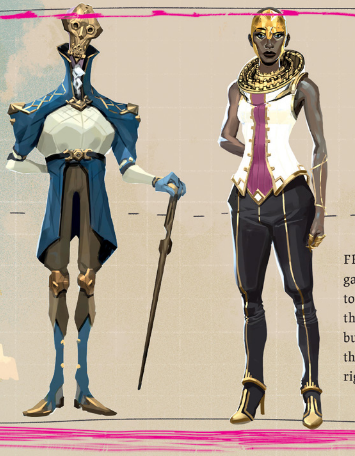
Matte painting of a fully Hexcorized alternate-future Jayce



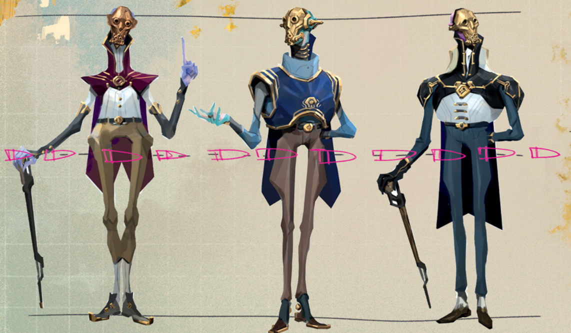
CROSSROADS OF THE WORLD

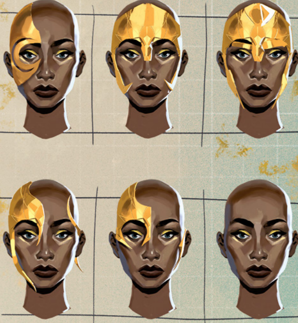
THERE'S ALL KINDS OF TRAVEL IN *ARCANE*; everything from airships to elevators between the cities, bridges, and, of course, the Hexgates.

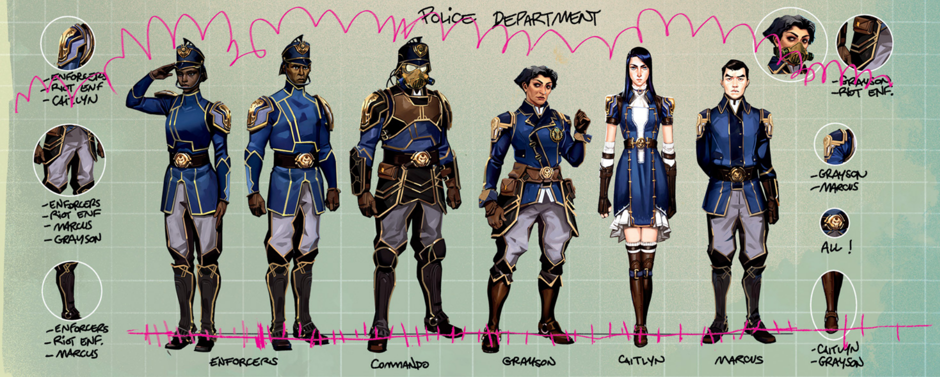
A SHOW OF PRECISION

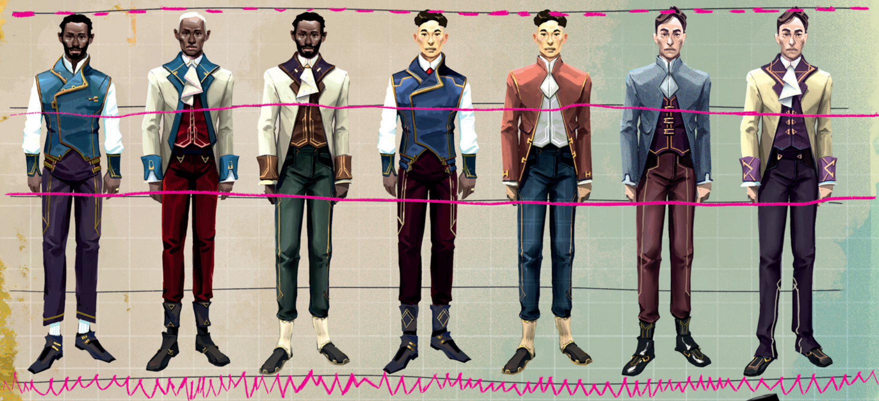


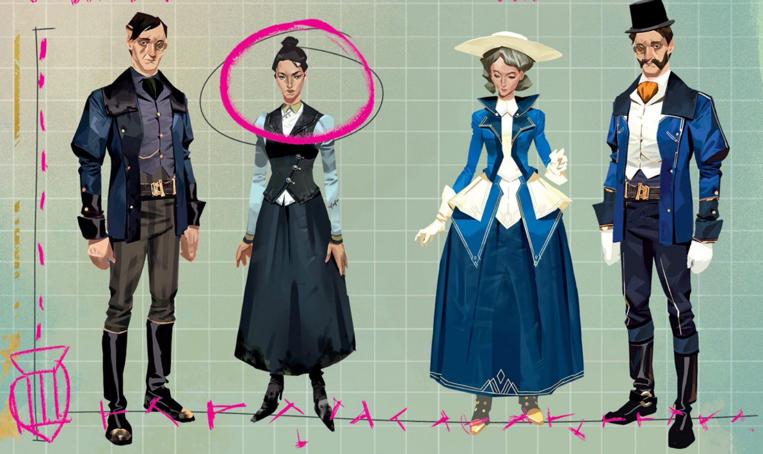
FROM THE COUNCIL'S ELABORATE garments and the Enforcers' uniforms to the outfits of typical Piltover residents, the topside is not only a visual feast, but the costumes' styles reinforce the way this particular society puts a premium on rigor, order, ostentation, and innovation.

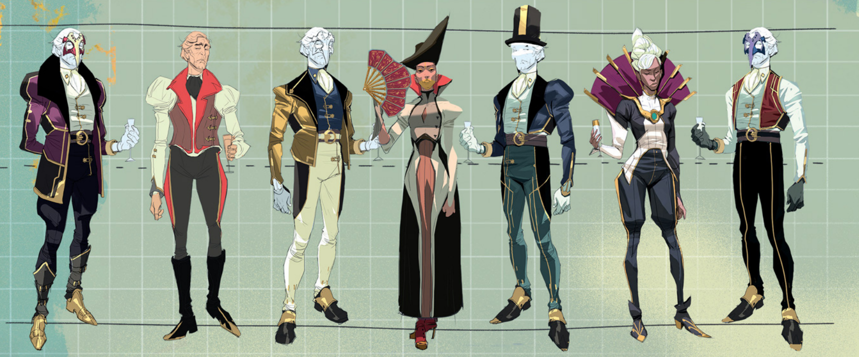


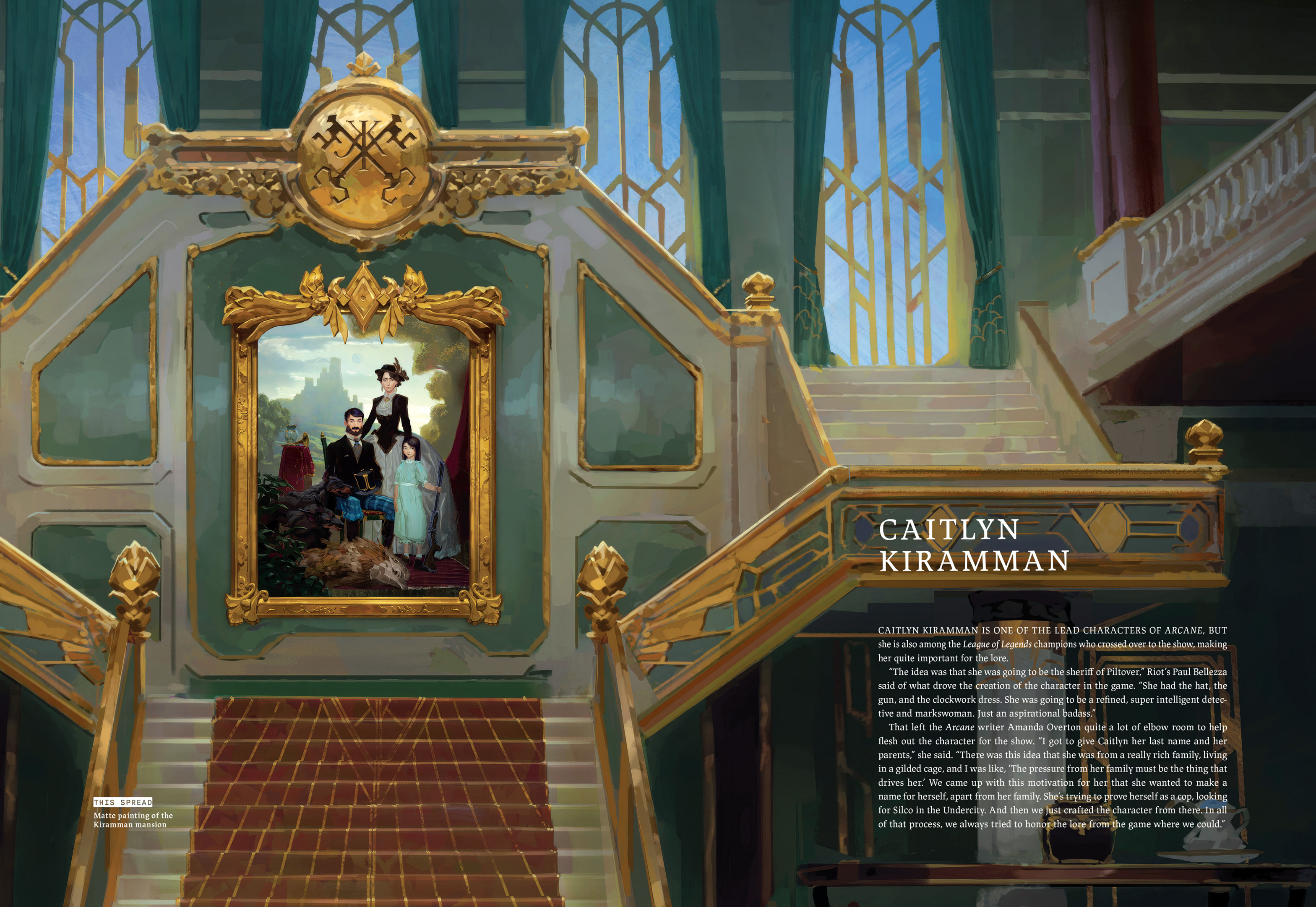



POLICE DEPARTMENT
-ENFORCERS
-RIOT ENF
-CAITLYN
-ENFORCERS
-RIOT ENF
-MARCUS
-GRAYSON
-ENFORCERS
-RIOT ENF.
-MARCUS
ENFORCERS
COMMANDO
GRAYSON
CAITLYN
MARCUS
-GRAYSON
-RIOT ENF.
-GRAYSON
-MARCUS
ALL !
-CAITLYN
-GRAYSON









THIS SPREAD
Matte painting of the Kiramman mansion

CAITLYN KIRAMMAN

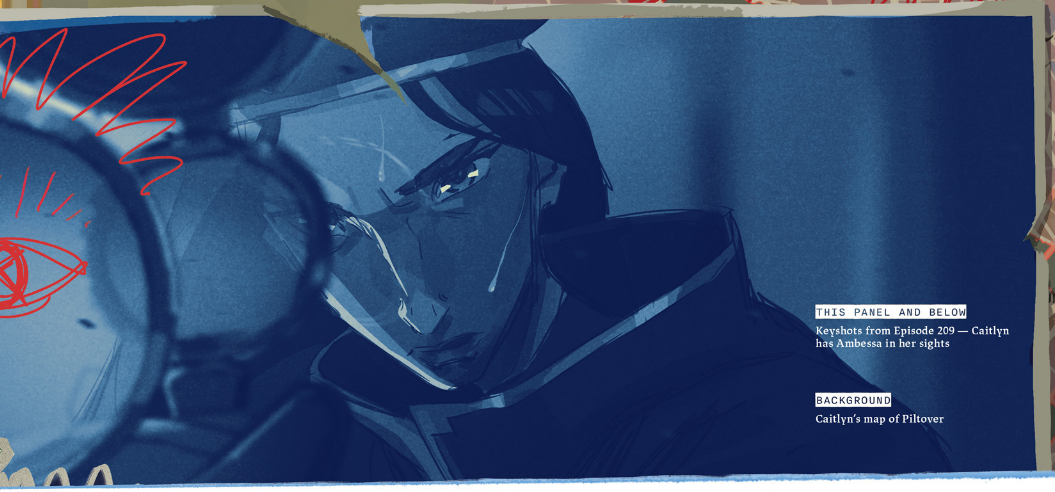
CAITLYN KIRAMMAN IS ONE OF THE LEAD CHARACTERS OF *ARCANE*, BUT she is also among the *League of Legends* champions who crossed over to the show, making her quite important for the lore.

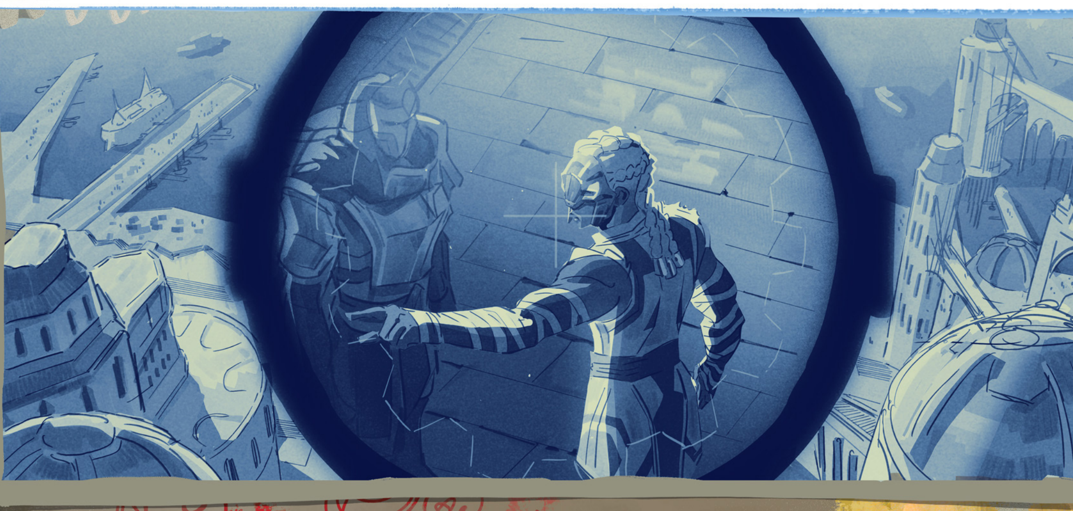
"The idea was that she was going to be the sheriff of Piltover," Riot's Paul Bellezza said of what drove the creation of the character in the game. "She had the hat, the gun, and the clockwork dress. She was going to be a refined, super intelligent detective and markswoman. Just an aspirational badass."

That left the *Arcane* writer Amanda Overton quite a lot of elbow room to help flesh out the character for the show. "I got to give Caitlyn her last name and her parents," she said. "There was this idea that she was from a really rich family, living in a gilded cage, and I was like, 'The pressure from her family must be the thing that drives her.' We came up with this motivation for her that she wanted to make a name for herself, apart from her family. She's trying to prove herself as a cop, looking for Silco in the Undercity. And then we just crafted the character from there. In all of that process, we always tried to honor the lore from the game where we could."

As an Enforcer and, in Season 2, the foremost defender of law and order in Piltover, Caitlyn has a relatively distant demeanor—which turns out to hide a fiery nature, especially when a certain pink-haired brawler is concerned. "What we've done through the show is illustrate that Caitlyn and Vi are much, much more than just partners, which is something fans have always kind of speculated and desired," Bellezza said.

While Runeterra as a whole and Piltover in particular might feel very remote from our own world, what people wear has to be visually interesting and be plausible, but also make sense from a storytelling perspective. As someone with the immediately identifiable jobs of Enforcer then sheriff, Caitlyn bridges the two sensibilities. Her *Arcane* costume diverges a little bit from her *League of Legends* one, and manga fans will be delighted to know that Leiji Matsumoto's creation Captain Harlock, a dashing space pirate, was among the inspirations. "Believability matters to me: I want people to believe in these characters, and their costumes play a big part in that," Julien Georgel said. "We were very happy with Caitlyn, and she's very different from the game. She's one of the oldest characters in the game, and those tend to be a little obvious: the top hat, the gold trims, and the ruffles did not match a character who was meant to be severe and reserved. That didn't work at all, especially when you saw Caitlyn's mother, Cassandra, who's even stiffer and more reserved—and we wanted to establish a family connection between the two. Riot came up with the basic direction, and we loved their ideas. It was really, really cool."



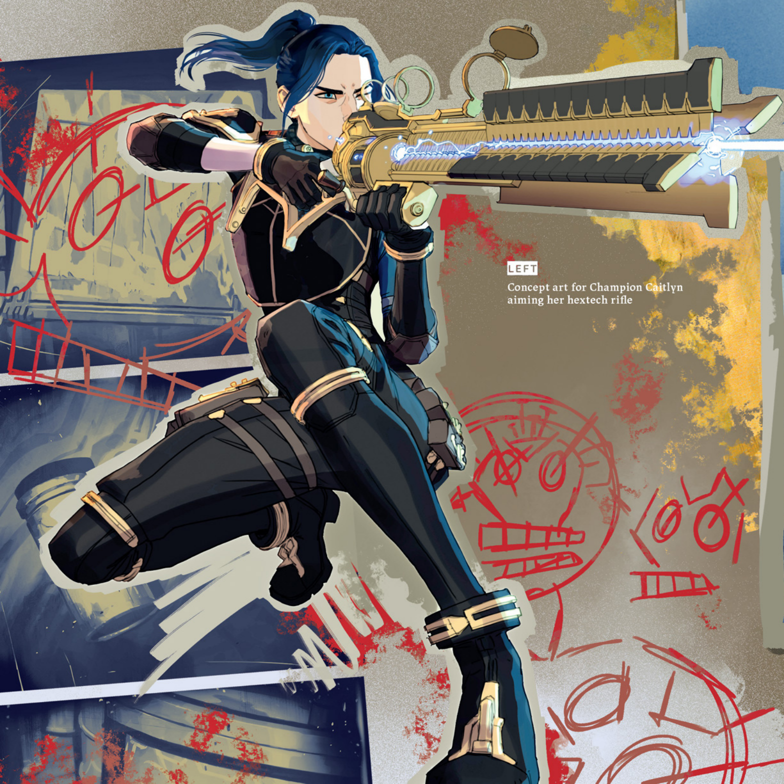


THIS PANEL AND BELOW

Keyshots from Episode 209 — Caitlyn has Ambessa in her sights

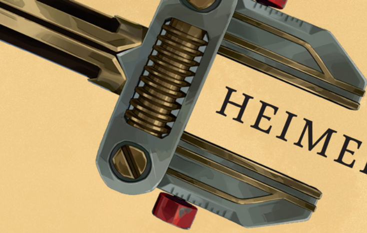
BACKGROUND

Caitlyn's map of Piltover



LEFT

Concept art for Champion Caitlyn aiming her hextech rifle

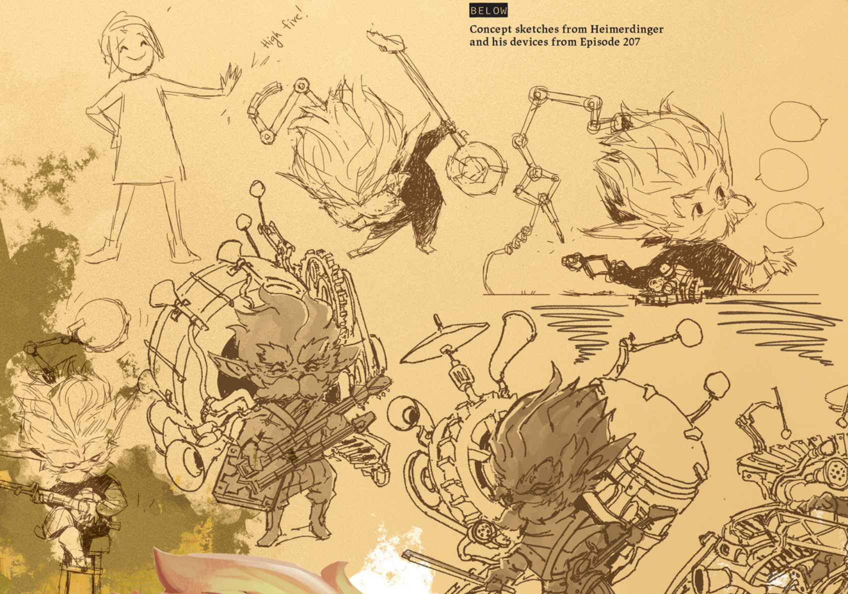


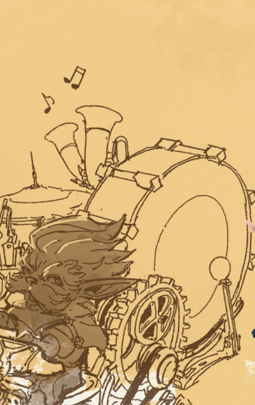
HEIMERDINGER

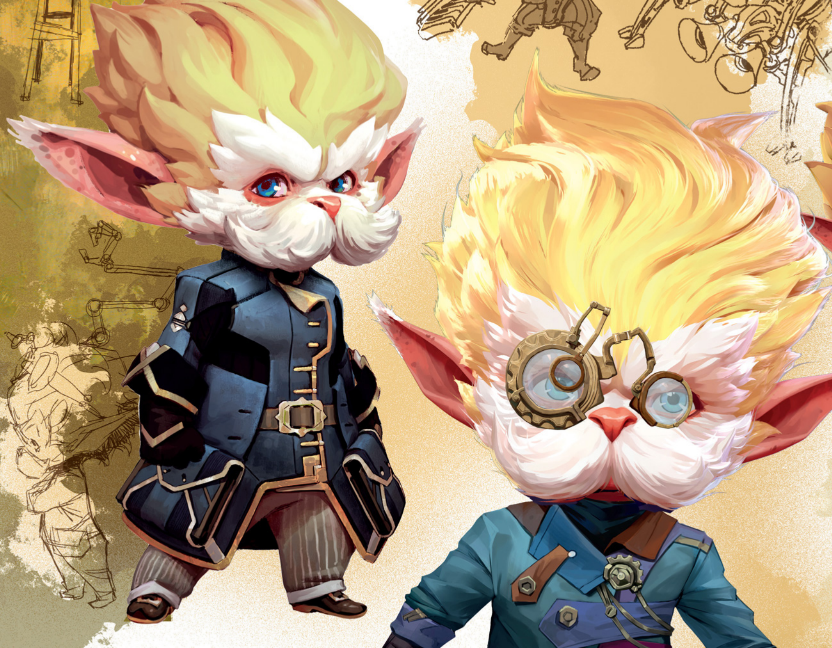
ONE OF THE ICONIC MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL IS Heimerdinger, who is a yordle. In *League of Legends*, yordles are an inherently magical and functionally immortal race hailing from the illusive Bandle City. Their matter-of-fact presence in the show illustrates the vastness of the world beyond the boundaries of Zaun and Piltover. In addition, yordles are diminutive, furry beings—though not all of them are quite as charming as Heimerdinger. *Arcane* never wanted to follow any obvious paths and their very presence in the show was the object of protracted discussions. "There was a lot of internal struggle about 'Should we have yordles? Should they be something else?'" said Larry Ray, an art director for *League of Legends*. "What I really appreciate about what Alex and Christian are doing is the way they handled yordles and their unique, perky personalities. When you play Heimer in the game, he's just quirky and fun, and kind of scatterbrained, but he's also a super-intelligent inventor. In the show he has a more mature, sophisticated look, so he's cohesive in that environment. But players still understand who he is because he's still performing or acting the same way they experienced in the game."

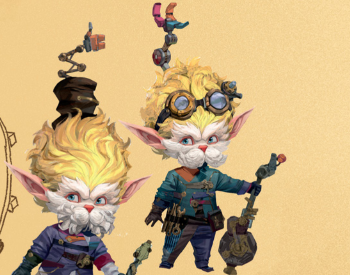
BELOW

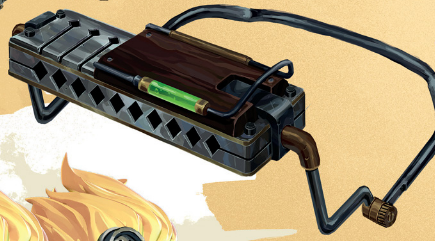
Concept sketches from Heimerdinger and his devices from Episode 207

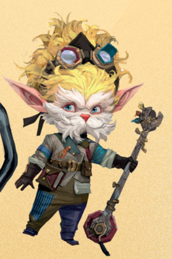


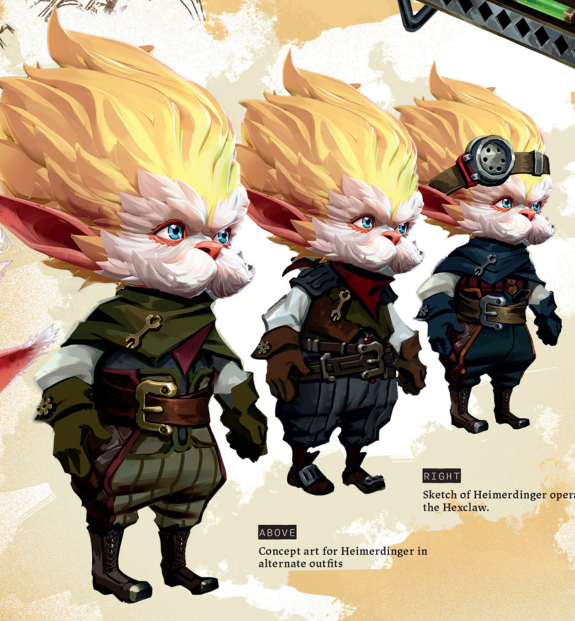






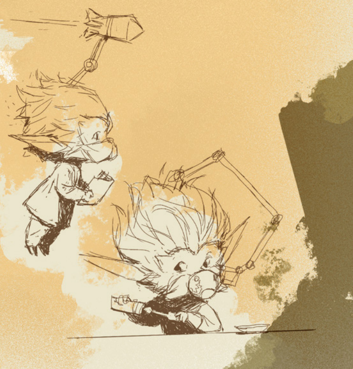






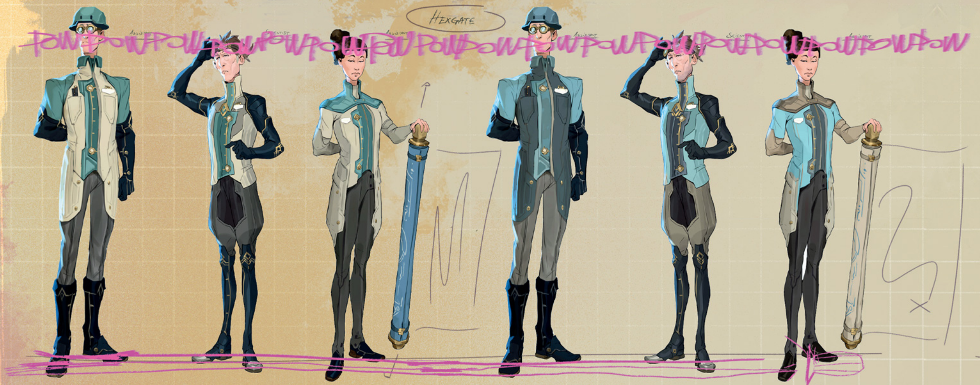
ABOVE

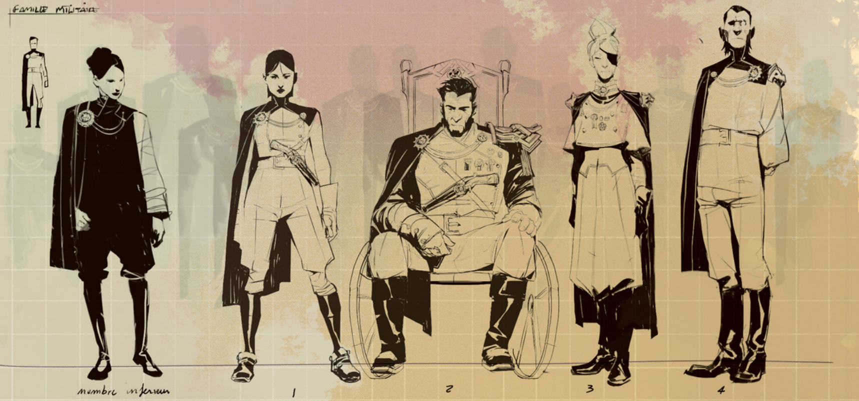
Concept art for Heimerdinger in alternate outfits

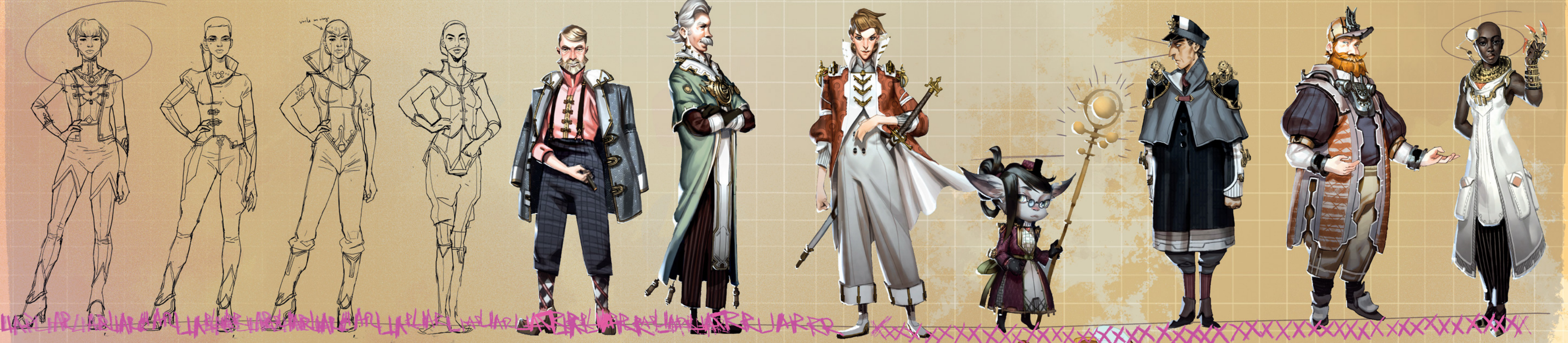


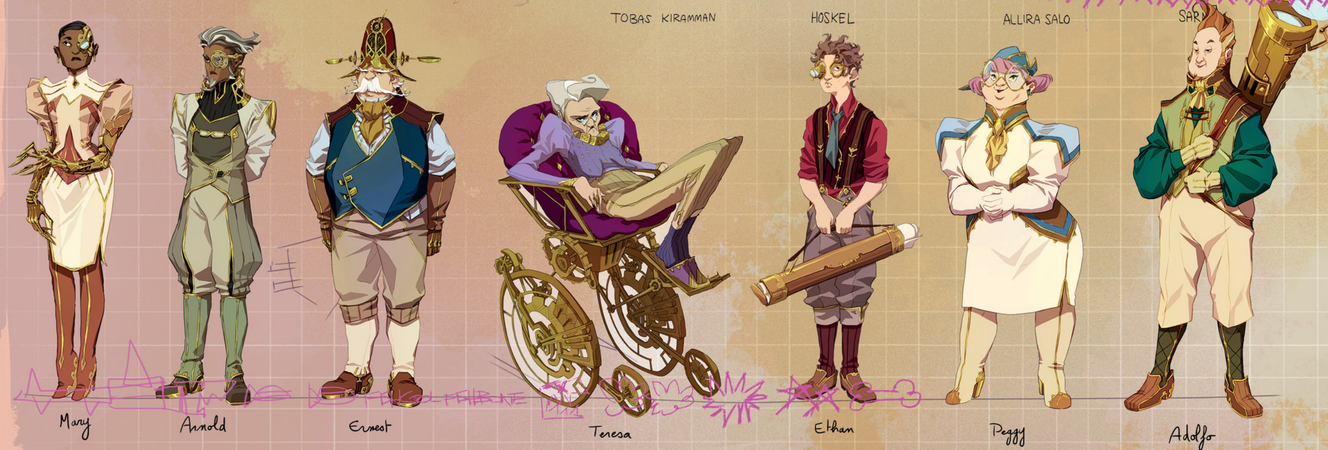
RIGHT

Sketch of Heimerdinger operating the Hexclaw.


HEXGATE
POWPOWPOWPOWPOWPOWPOWPOWPOWPOWPOWPOW

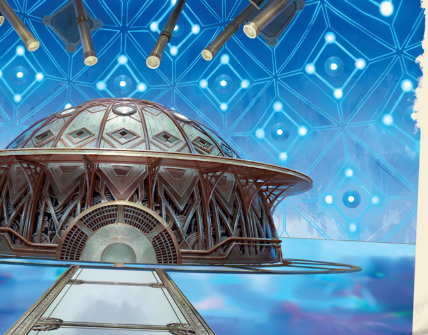

FAMILLE MILITAIRE
membre inferieur
1
2
3
4

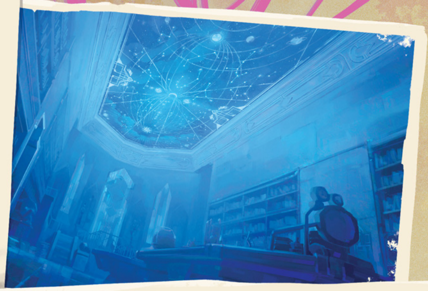

TOBAS KIRAMMAN
HOSKEL
ALLIRA SALO
SAR
BORONAS COSI
TAVIS MOORE
SHOOLA


Mary
Arnold
Ernest
Teresa
Ethan
Peggy
Adolfo

THE UNDERSTUDIES

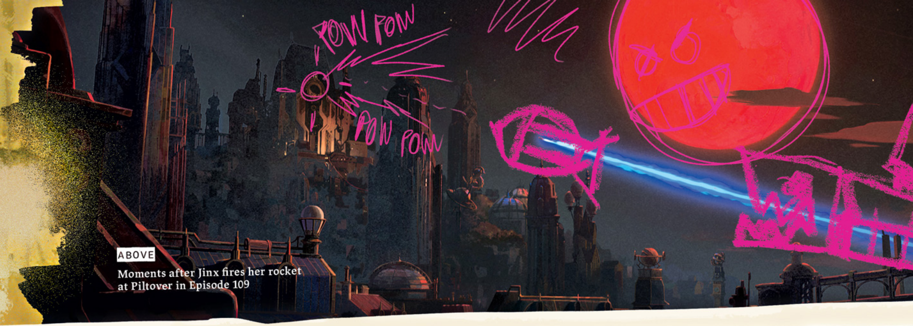
TAKE A LOOK AT THE CITIZENS of Piltover who were designed for the series and evolved into the tertiary and background characters we see in the final product.





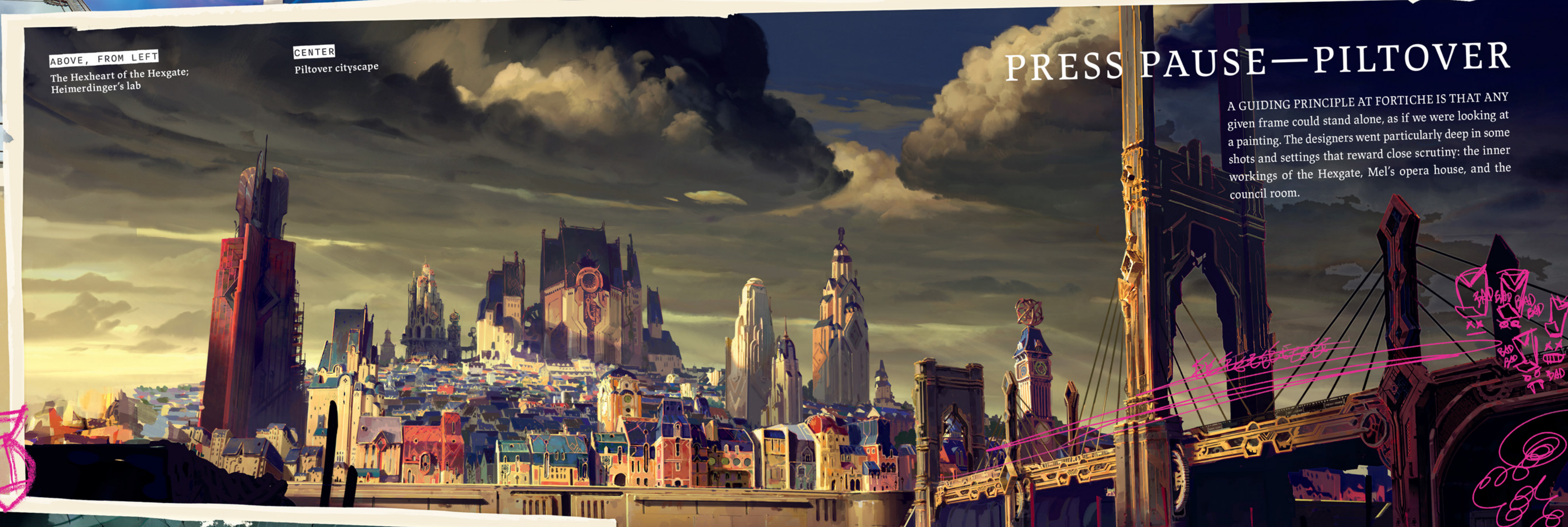
ABOVE, FROM LEFT

The Hexheart of the Hexgate; Heimerdinger's lab



ABOVE

Moments after Jinx fires her rocket at Piltover in Episode 109

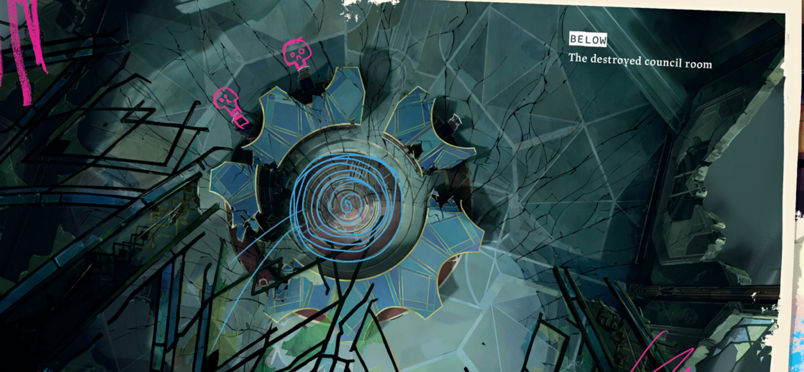


CENTER

Piltover cityscape

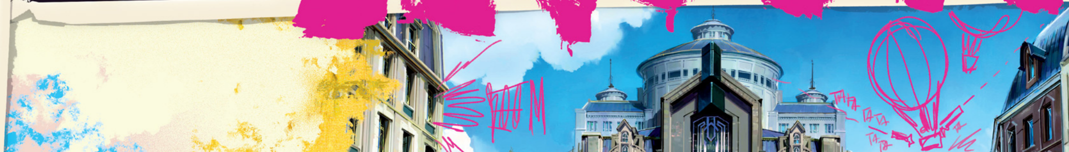
PRESS PAUSE—PILTOVER

A GUIDING PRINCIPLE AT FORTICHE IS THAT ANY given frame could stand alone, as if we were looking at a painting. The designers went particularly deep in some shots and settings that reward close scrutiny: the inner workings of the Hexgate, Mel's opera house, and the council room.



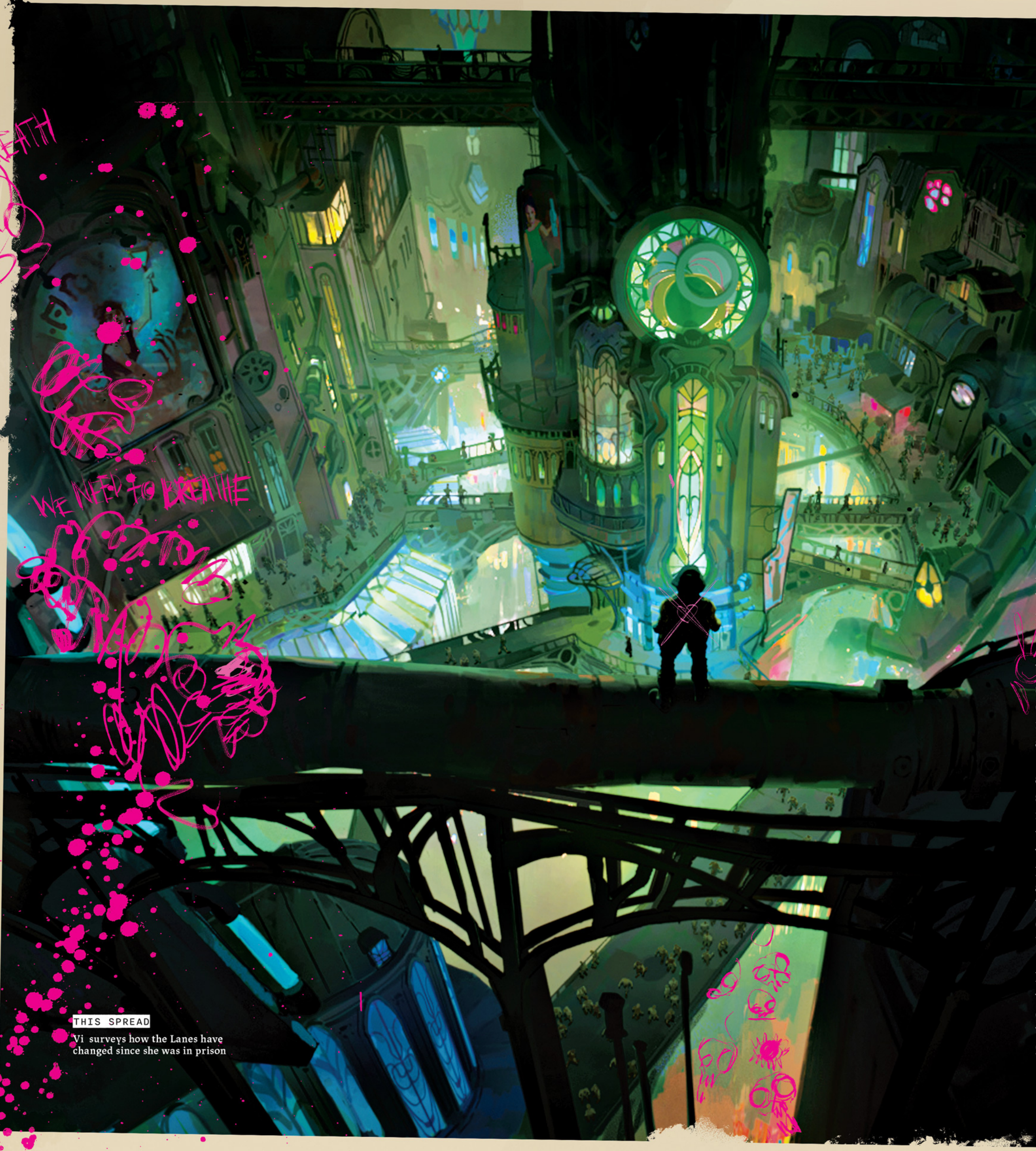
BELOW

The destroyed council room



BELOW

Mel Medarda's Opera House



THIS SPREAD Vi surveys how the Lanes have changed since she was in prison

4

EXPLORING THE DEPTHS

ZAUN HAS A WAY OF HIJACKING THE STURDIEST NARRATIVES AND drawing focus to itself. The undercity has a messy glory all of its own. This is a place that welcomes outcasts, a refuge for those who don't have a home. Sure, there are dangers, but there is also community, creativity, and the thrilling sense that anything is possible.

Pushing the boundaries of conventions is part of Zaun's DNA, which makes the city and its denizens almost avant-garde in their tastes, behavior, and outlook. Whereas Piltover follows codes and hierarchies, Zaun explodes them. This does not make one city better than the other—they complement each other.

The similarly Manichean notion that the cities have drastically different levels of wealth and legality does not reflect the complicated reality. "The city from below is rich with diversity, and some people do have money," Julien Georgel said. "And Zaun is not completely lawless, though there are issues with the mob, drugs, etc." This complexity is represented in the physical layout as well: Zaun reaches deep, then deeper. "There are different layers in Zaun, including the old abandoned mines where Vi and Jinx come from," Georgel pointed out.

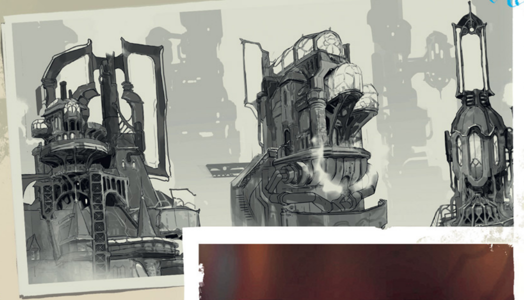
As usual with *Arcane*, people and things are more complicated than they might appear, and keeping track of all the complexities—and, yes, layers—entailed sharing specifications and fundamental principles so that everybody could work in unison. You can see this thought process in a set of guidelines distributed to the various creative teams that banded together to create and maintain a coherent world. For Zaun for instance, "everything is designed to withstand extreme pressure and potential explosions"—meaning that that city's very design suggests a place where danger is ever-present. For Piltover, on the other hand, the guidelines remind the writers and artists that "designs may look spindly, delicate, and opulent" and that "form and materials are aspirational, designed to reveal wealth. Early prototypes might end up in a museum or in a clan's private collections."

The same lines of thinking suggest recycling as key to envisioning Zaun, both literally and figuratively. When designing the underground city and the characters who live there, the guidelines suggest that Zaun is all about "making magic out of nothing. Nothing is precious, everything can be reworked and made better. Who made something first matters less than who made the better invention." If Zaun had a motto, it might well be "Necessity is the mother of invention."

For Amanda Overton, there were important things to keep in mind when writing scenes involving Zaun and its denizens. For example, that the city is just as focused on creativity as Piltover is, just in a different way and with different goals. "Even though they are oppressed in Zaun, they are still able to innovate in ways that the topside isn't, where they have rigid rules and you can only do things a certain way," she said. "They are like, 'Well, let's take this freedom we have because they don't care about us, and use it to find beauty and innovation. That's kind of where Ekko's little enclave came in. The contrast in the tech and the organic, and the levels of the society come from those elements of the story. Then Fortiche just takes that and runs with it. All of those people spend ten thousand hours figuring out how to do the designs so that the fans of the game will love them, but they'll also be cool for the show."

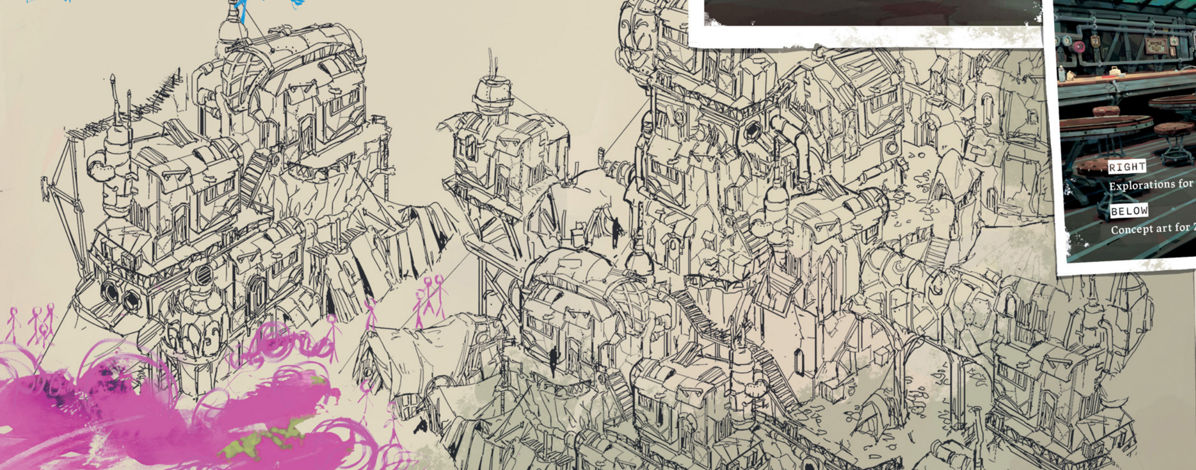
The importance of resourcefulness and inventiveness for Zaunites is spelled out explicitly in Season 2—along with the bittersweet realization that the city harbored much unrealized potential, which is developed in the alternate timeline of Episode 207, where Ekko and a grown-up Powder are flourishing and in love.

Season 2 is also when the relationship between the two cities becomes even more complex. There are more interactions and more journeys between the two, the lines are increasingly blurred. For Christian Linke, this illustrated a further refining of the worldview of a show that thrives on complicated situations. "In Season 2, Caitlyn tells Jayce, like, 'I've learned how easy it is to hate them.' We definitely wanted to explore that. It's something very real that we go through right now, where it is very easy to hate the other side, no matter which country you're in. I think exploring that feeling was something we definitely carried into the whole process."



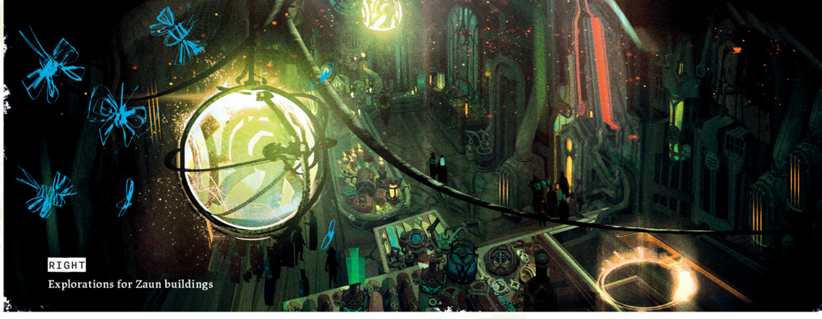
ABOVE

Concept art for Zaun buildings



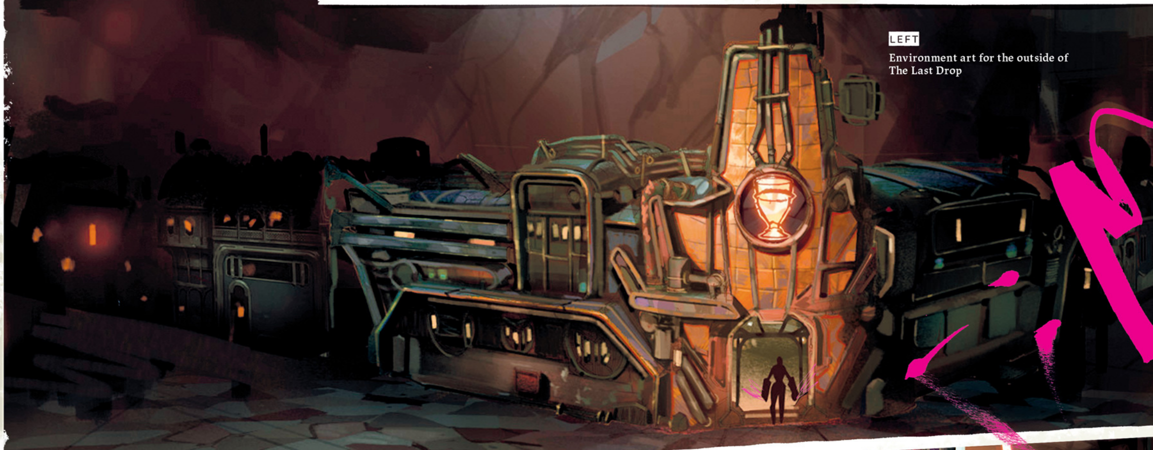
BELOW

Early concept sketch for Zaun architecture



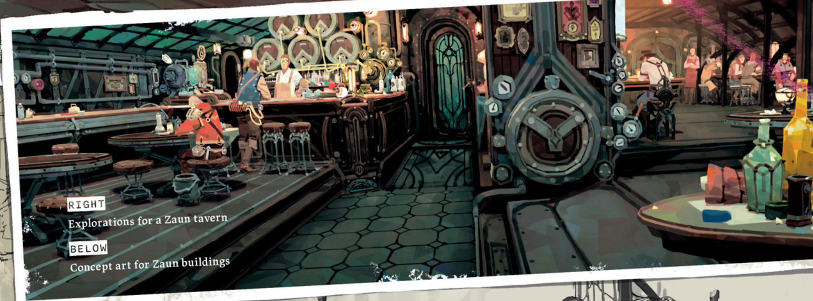
RIGHT

Explorations for Zaun buildings



LEFT

Environment art for the outside of The Last Drop

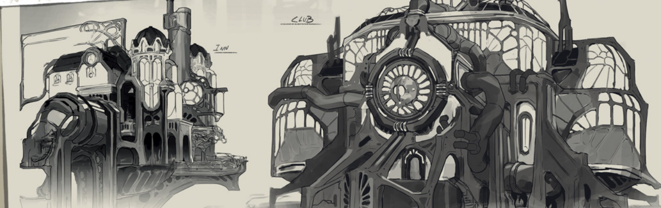


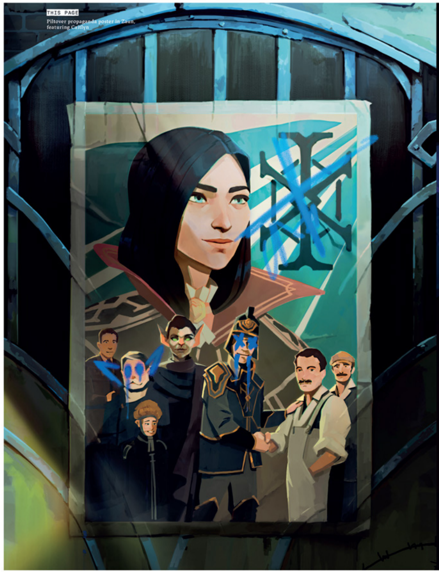
RIGHT

Explorations for a Zaun tavern

BELOW

Concept art for Zaun buildings





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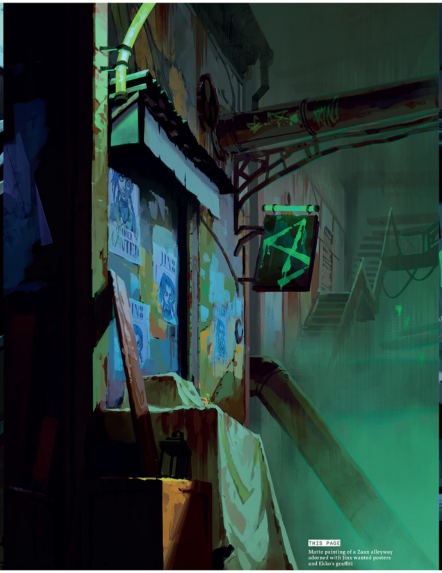
Piltover propaganda poster in Zaun, featuring Caitlyn



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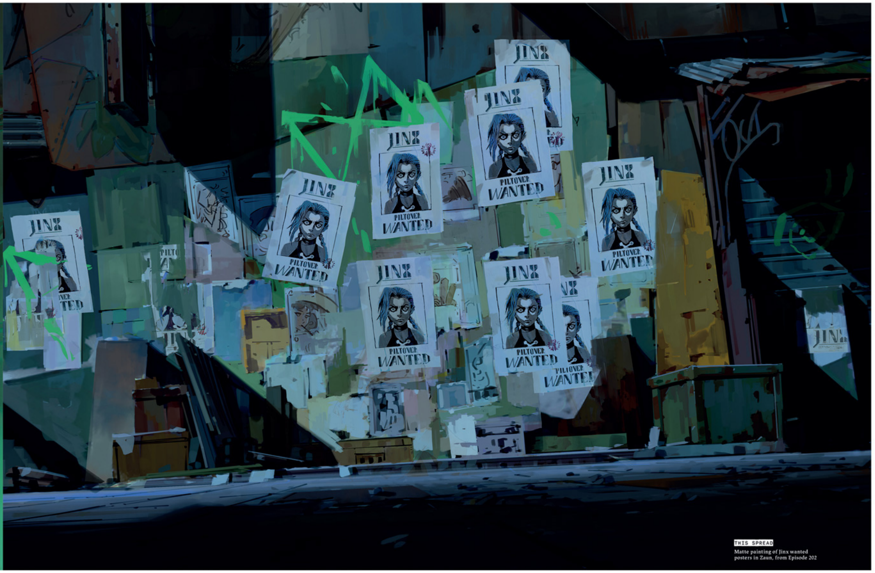
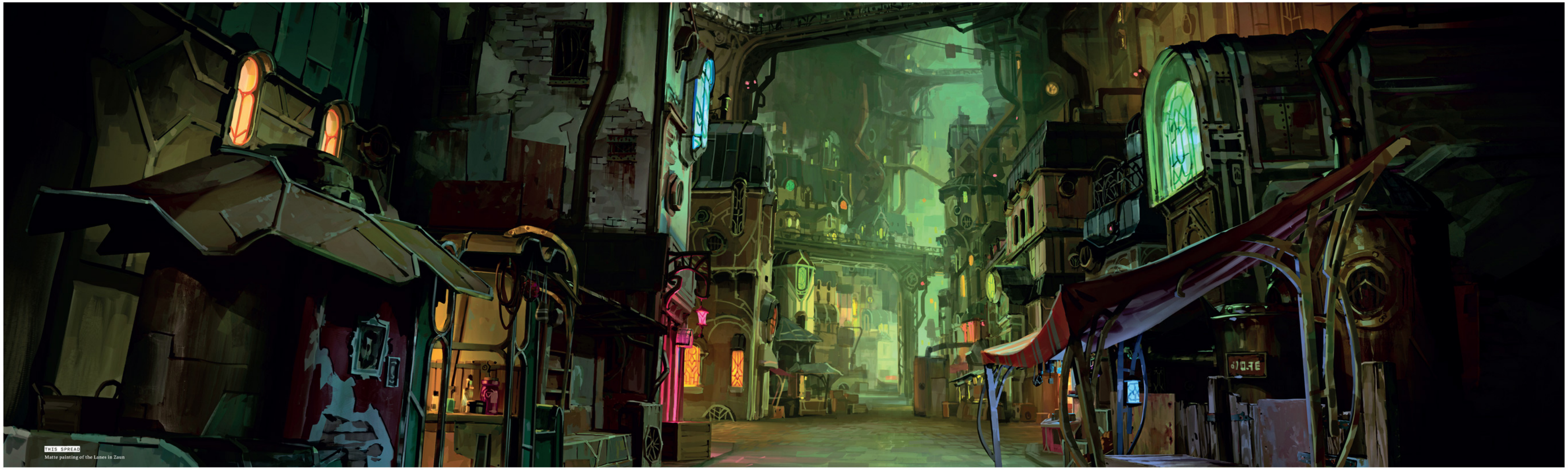
Matte painting of a Zaun alleyway adorned with Jinx wanted posters and Ekko's graffiti



THIS SPREAD

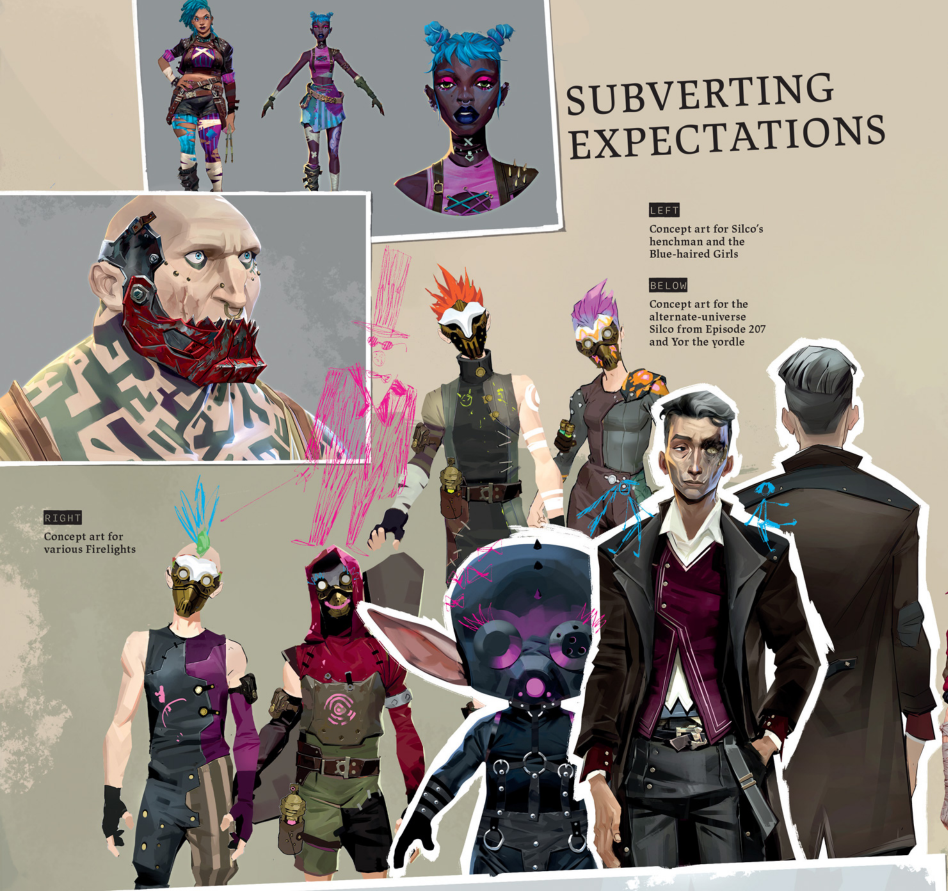
Matte painting of Jinx wanted posters in Zaun, from Episode 202



THIS SPREAD

Matte painting of the Lanes in Zaun

SUBVERTING EXPECTATIONS



LEFT

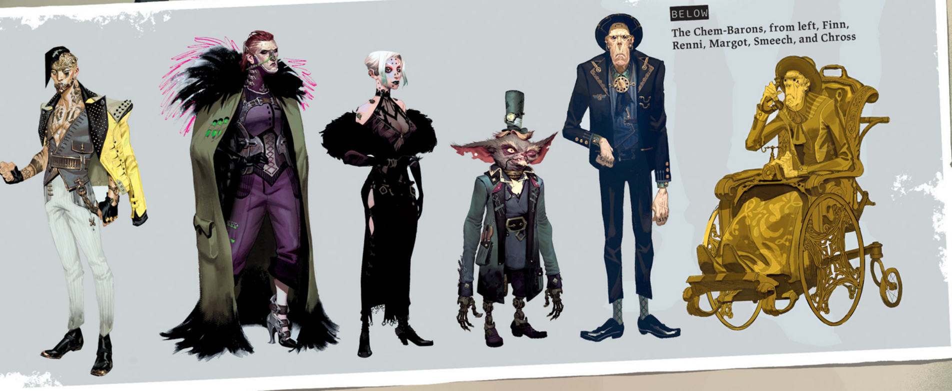
Concept art for Silco's henchman and the Blue-haired Girls

BELOW

Concept art for the alternate-universe Silco from Episode 207 and Yor the yordle

RIGHT

Concept art for various Firelights



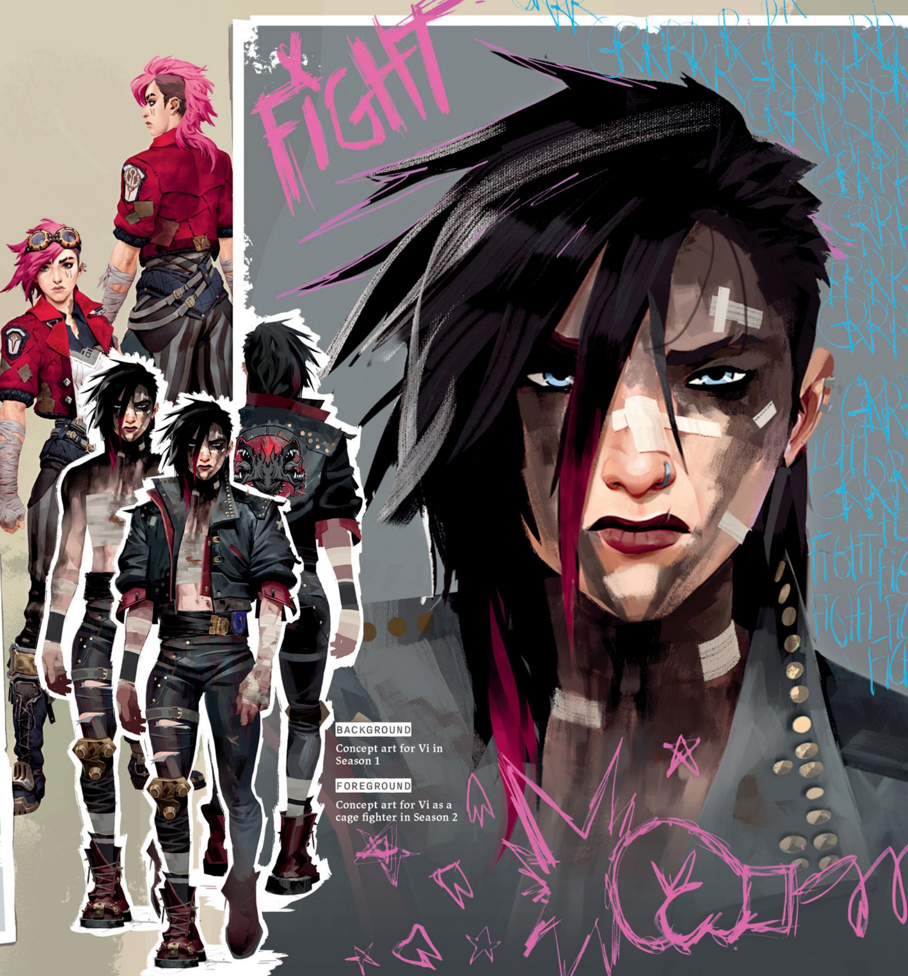
BELOW

The Chem-Barons, from left, Finn, Renni, Margot, Smeech, and Chross

Vi

"SO MUCH GOES INTO THE OUTFITS THAT IT'S CRAZY," Riot's Jason Chan said. "You'll probably notice three or four things, like standard Vi from the last season, then Enforcer Vi, MMA Vi, and then the final version. There's actually so much in between because we're trying to think about how it works logically. When she's in the hospital, she has certain bandages and we did lots of explorations on how the bandages work, how the shirt that she wears under her armor works and how it comes off—because we did the love scene—so it has to actually function. We have to figure out how all these specific things work. We're not building them in real life, but we practically have."

And because Vi always seems to find herself in violent scraps, more trips to the Zaun pharmacy would be required. The director Bart Maunoury pointed out that when she becomes a kind of pit fighter in the Zaun underground in Episode 205, she wears a lot of bandages, again: "That's a direct reference to Marv, a character from Frank Miller's comics series *Sin City*, who is played by Mickey Rourke in the movie. He's very dark with white bandages that really pop out."



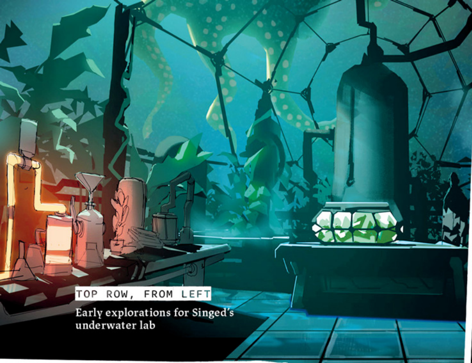
BACKGROUND

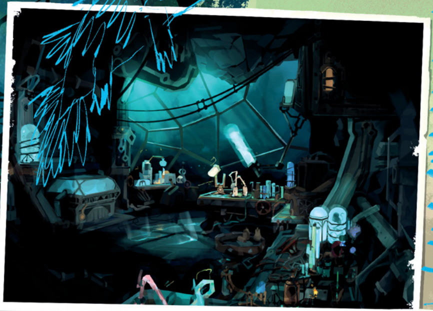
Concept art for Vi in Season 1

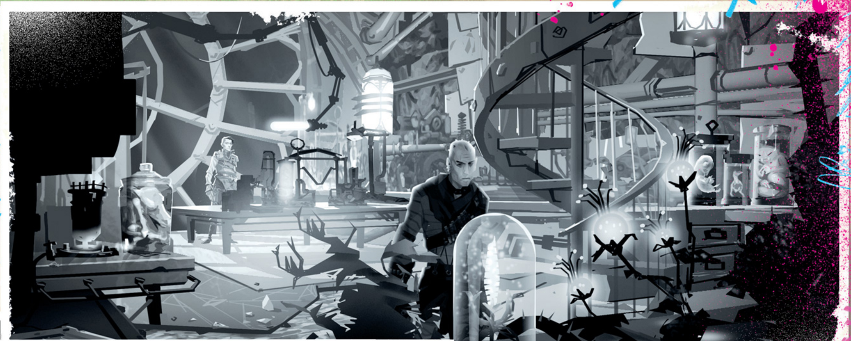
FOREGROUND

Concept art for Vi as a cage fighter in Season 2

NEON UNDERGROUND

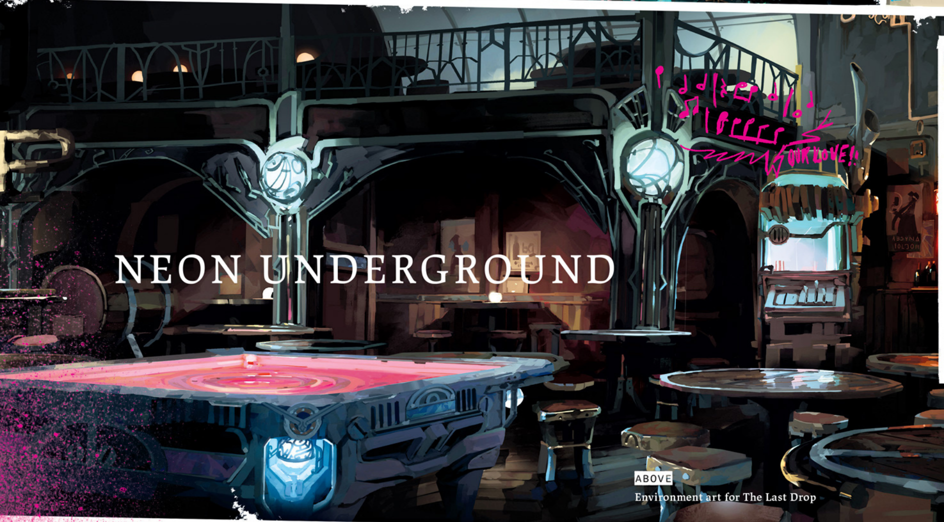






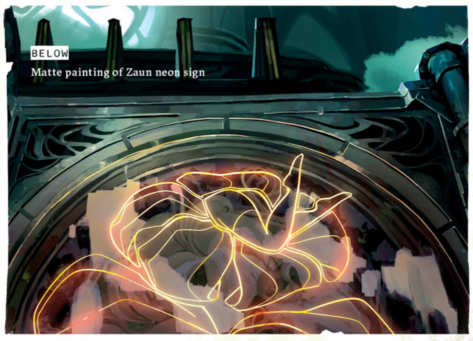
TOP ROW, FROM LEFT

Early explorations for Singed's underwater lab



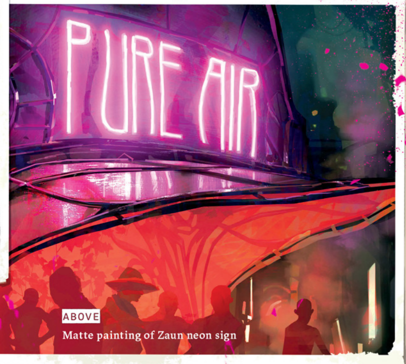
ABOVE

Environment art for The Last Drop



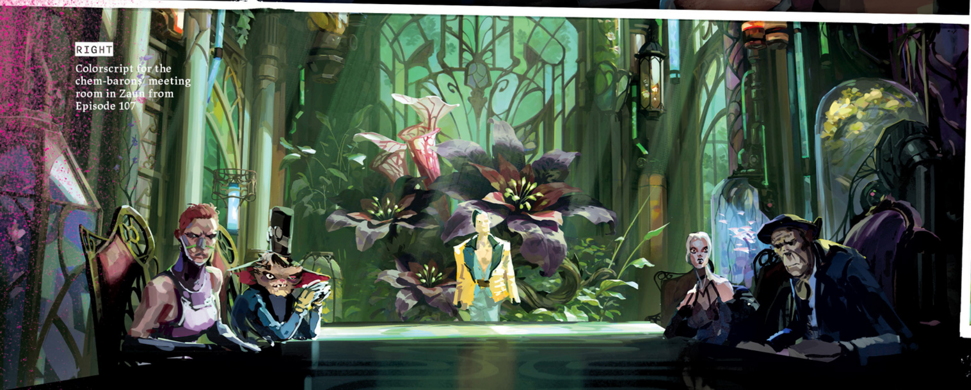
BELOW

Matte painting of Zaun neon sign



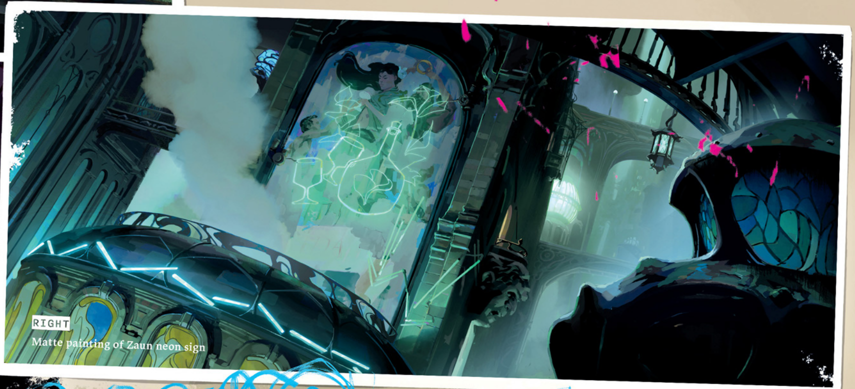
ABOVE

Matte painting of Zaun neon sign



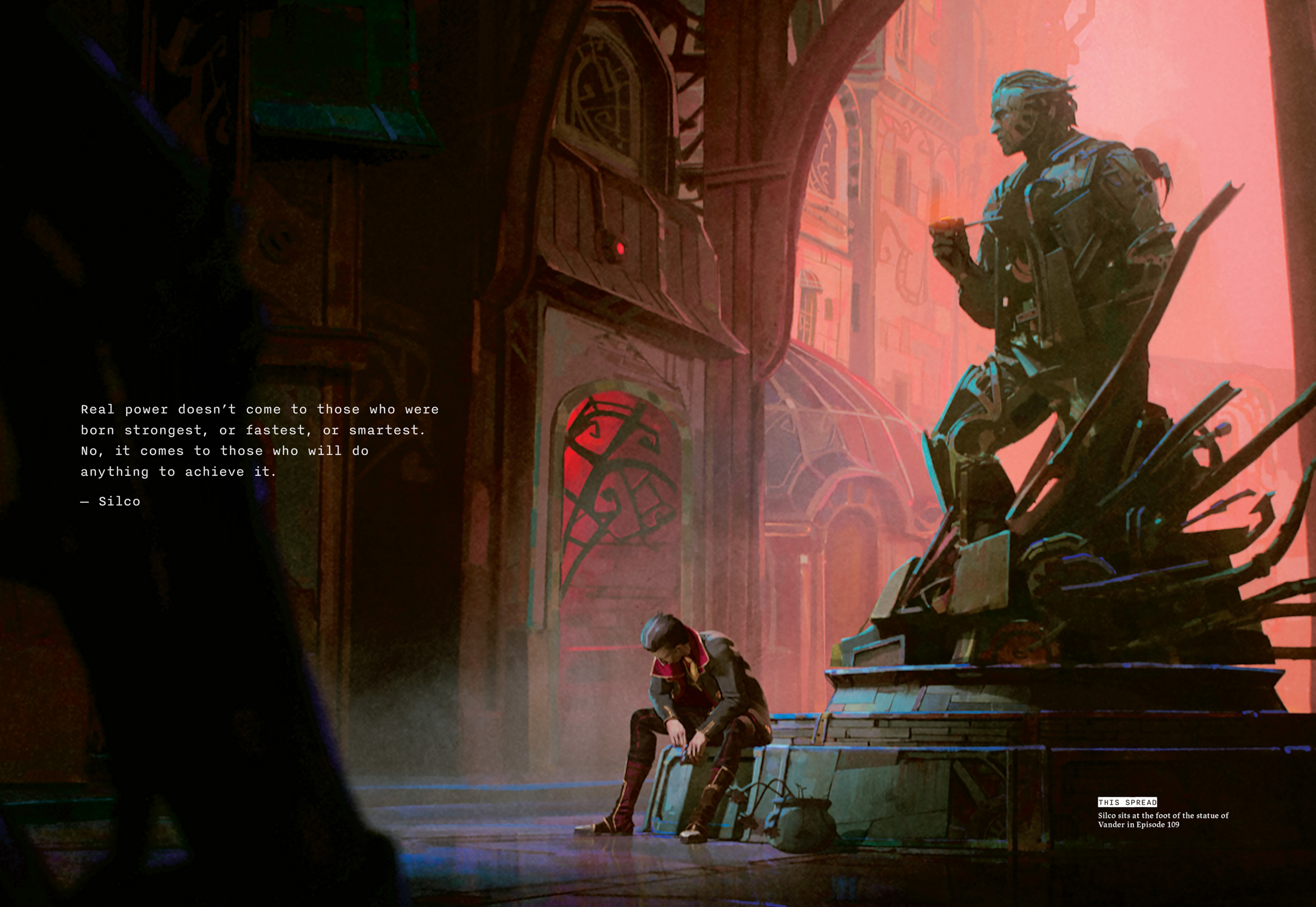
RIGHT

Colorscript for the chem-barons' meeting room in Zaun from Episode 107



RIGHT

Matte painting of Zaun neon sign

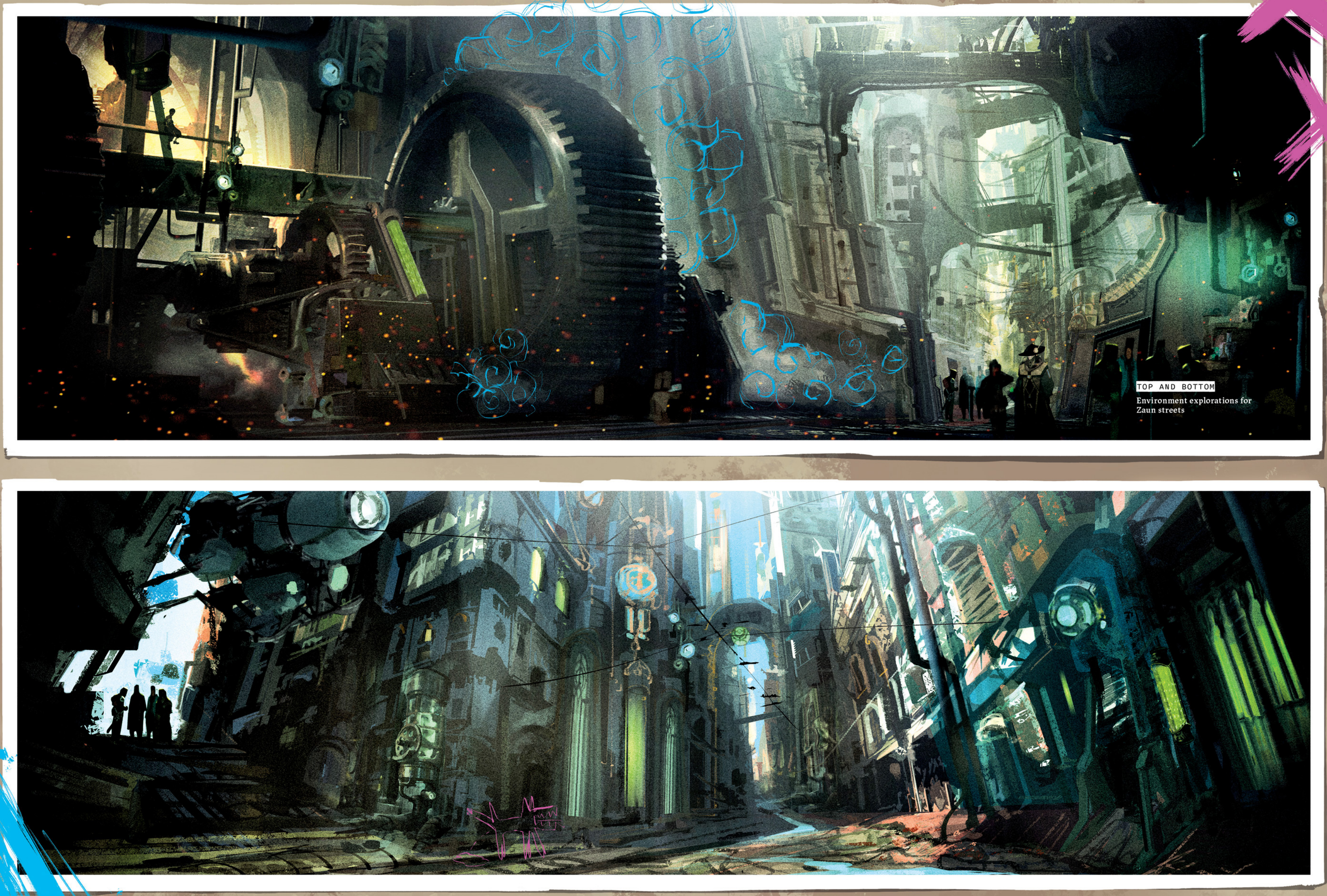


Real power doesn't come to those who were born strongest, or fastest, or smartest. No, it comes to those who will do anything to achieve it.

— Silco

THIS SPREAD

Silco sits at the foot of the statue of Vander in Episode 109

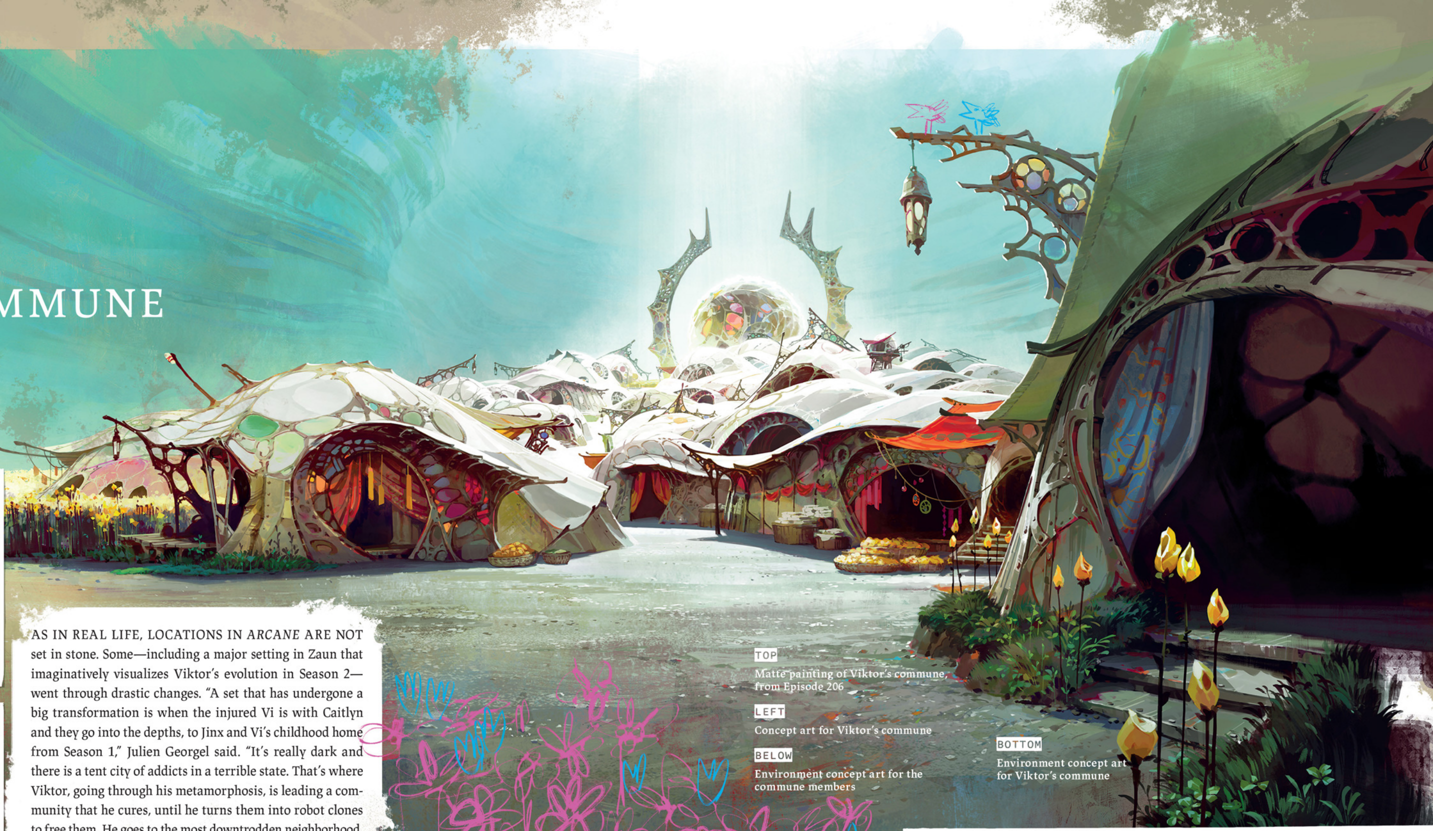


TOP AND BOTTOM

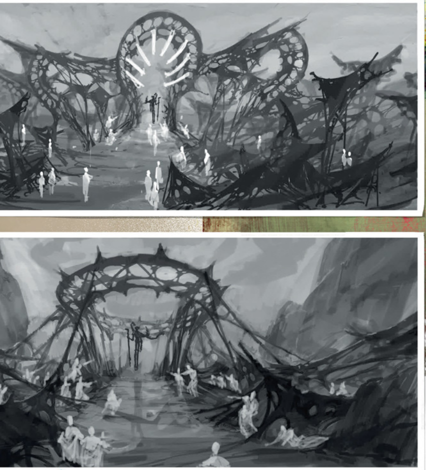
Environment explorations for Zaun streets

STAGE 2

VIKTOR'S COMMUNE



TOP
Matte painting of Viktor's commune, from Episode 206



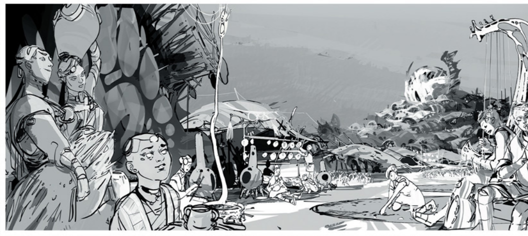
LEFT
Concept art for Viktor's commune

AS IN REAL LIFE, LOCATIONS IN *ARCANE* ARE NOT set in stone. Some—including a major setting in Zaun that imaginatively visualizes Viktor's evolution in Season 2—went through drastic changes. "A set that has undergone a big transformation is when the injured Vi is with Caitlyn and they go into the depths, to Jinx and Vi's childhood home from Season 1," Julien Georgel said. "It's really dark and there is a tent city of addicts in a terrible state. That's where Viktor, going through his metamorphosis, is leading a community that he cures, until he turns them into robot clones to free them. He goes to the most downtrodden neighborhood, abandoned by all, to create his community and try to make the human race evolve. So that's a setting that's important in Season 2: We see it as a garbage dump with some derelict tents and it turns into a flowery meadow with a beautiful light, halfway between a cult and a hippie commune. So that's a new environment and a new visual universe: We don't leave Piltover and Zaun but we are exposed to new settings, even new dimensions."

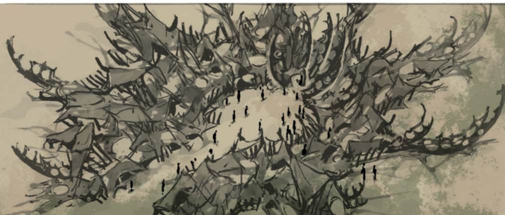
One of them is the Hexzone, which is Viktor's psychic domain in Season 2. "It's the version for Viktor in which everything makes sense and things are whole," Christian Linke said. You'll notice that he looks a bit healthier and a bit more human there, so it's the vision of what things beneath the surface should look like."

For Bart Maunoury, one of the directors of Season 2, the season mines a slightly different sensibility than its predecessor. "We gave ourselves license to explore something a little more psychedelic with Viktor and the Hexzone, with exuberant, crazy colors," he said, "This allowed us to go in wild directions. We played with iridescence, which means the light can be a little refracted, with some greens and purples. When you mention those colors, you start thinking of 1960s-style tie-dye shirts, so sometimes we'd catch ourselves: 'Oh, this is going too far.' We tried to find a balance."

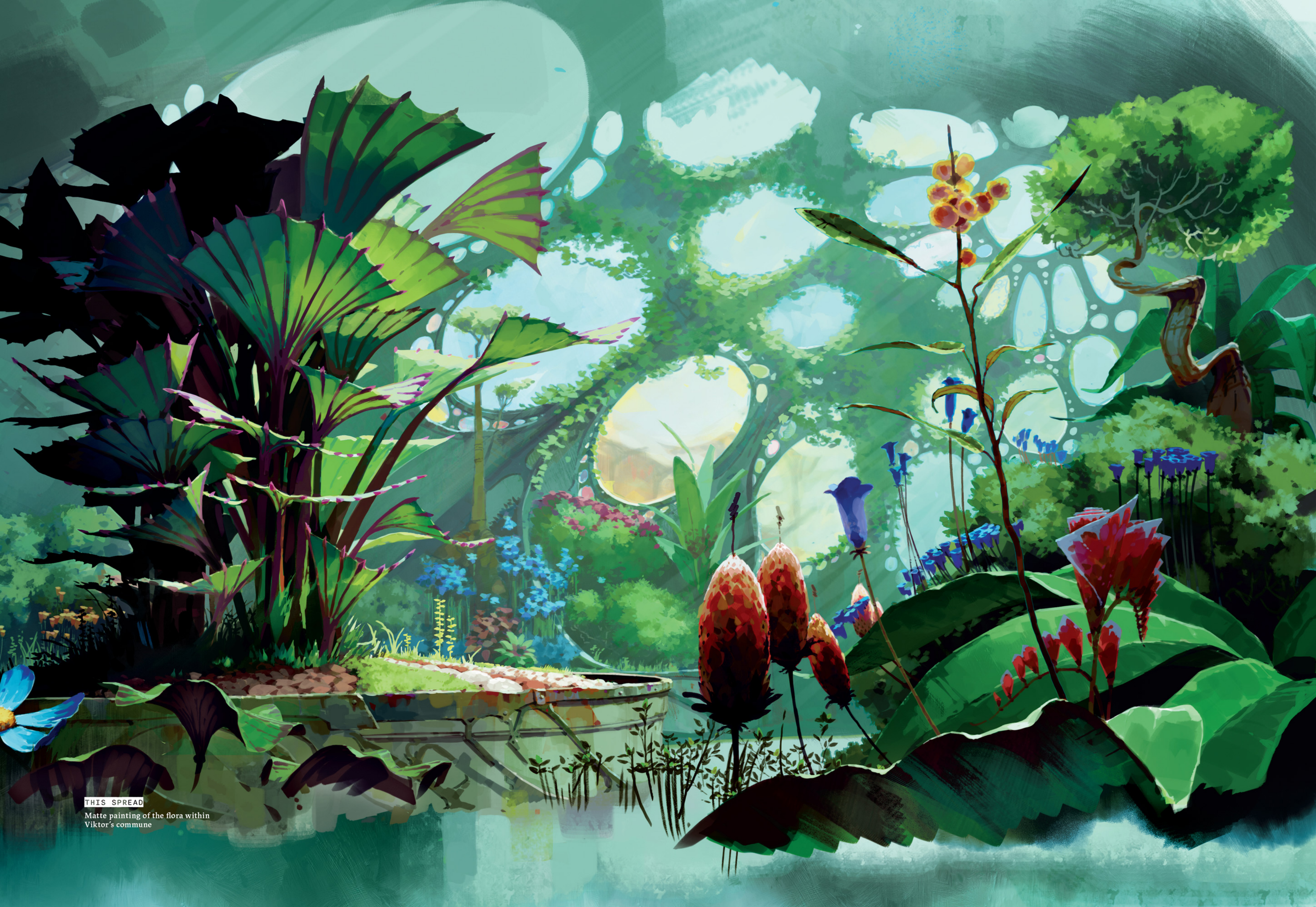
Finding that balance was especially key to keeping the show consistent, and sometimes it came down to a single scene or even a single shot. "The Hexzone was really freeing from a directing standpoint and you could really have fun, because you're dealing with almost cosmic creatures," Maunoury said. "If we had two characters in the same shot, like Viktor and Sky, we would create the illusion that we filmed them with two different lenses, like, 'Oh, if we shoot him in a tight close-up with a 25mm lens, that'll make him look taller and a bit deformed and we can have the other character in the same shot with an 80mm camera.'"



BELOW
Environment concept art for the commune members



BOTTOM
Environment concept art for Viktor's commune



THIS SPREAD

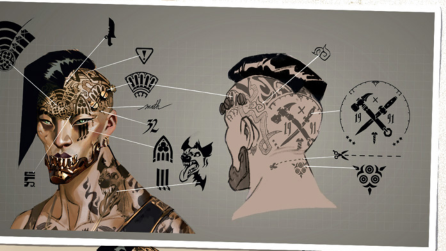
Matte painting of the flora within Viktor's commune

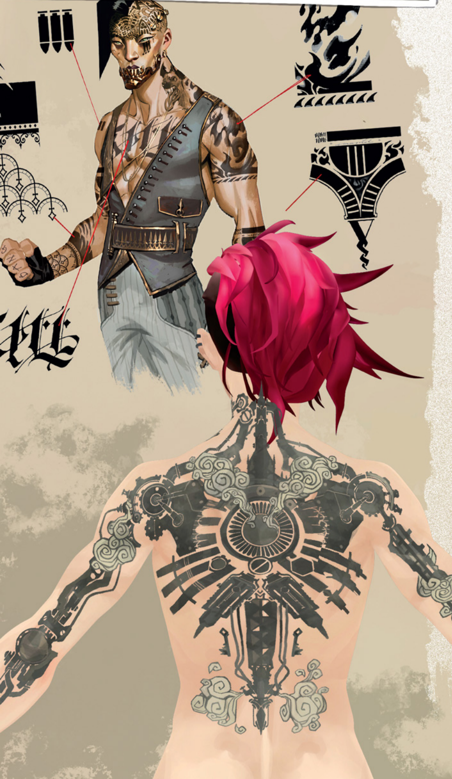
BODY MODIFICATION

BODY MODIFICATION FROM THE MINUTE TO THE EXTREME is a huge part of the Zaun aesthetic. The chem-barons are enthusiastic adherents, and each one of them is an illustration of imagination let loose. Characters like Vi, Jinx, and Finn have extensive, intricate tattoos. How could Vi's look be complete without her name inked on her cheek, after all? (Eagle-eyed fans will have noticed that the facial tattoo looks slightly different in the animation test done by Fortiche, where it lacks the two horizontal bars.) Over the course of the show, she also acquired a large tattoo of cogs and machinery on her back. "We made, I don't know, twenty versions of that tattoo," Arnaud-Loris Baudry said, laughing. Illustrating how a seemingly minor (in the grand scheme of things) detail could take up a lot of work, Baudry elaborated on how one thing could lead to another, then another. "We were wondering who had done the big tattoo," he said. "Vi was in prison for years so we had to design a prison, and that was tricky because Piltover is supposed to be a city of progress—do they really put people in prison? Maybe only people from the undercity, and maybe they put them really far away, a bit like Alcatraz. We worked on the design of that prison and at some point, we were like, 'No, we have to embrace that it's not a progressive prison.' We put the elevator in so it goes really deep. We were wondering what was the life of Vi in this prison, and we were preparing to have scenes with it. By working on that and on the tattoos, we found an idea that I think is based on a movie called *Red Dragon*, where the murderer has a big tattoo on his back."

The fan-favorite Sevika, who is associated with Silco and then with the chem-barons, is among the most flamboyant examples of body modification gone wild on the show. According to Pascal Charrue, her prosthetic arm "stumped several designers" because, as he explains, "it was important that the arm not be anatomically correct." Finally, character/concept artist Victor Maury came up with a solution: "A forearm that was very blocky, very powerful, and motorized," Charrue said. "It didn't have a round shape but was very angular. And it incorporated a mishmash of styles—Art Nouveau, gothic—that was typical of Zaun." The prosthetic changed in Season 2, when Jinx built her a new one. "Sevika commissioned her first arm so it's a little more conventional—even if it's pretty brutal and prompted a lot of hand-wringing over it—but the second one, she has to endure," Charrue explained. "She gets used to it because it's efficient, but it's not easy at first."

With a flourish both playful and macabre, the arm designed by Jinx even incorporates a slot machine—the arm's different configurations and effects depend on what the slot machine comes up with. As minor as it might seem, Sevika's prosthesis is a perfect example of Fortiche's attention to small parts that combine to create a rich whole: Not only is this visually creative, but the detail testifies to Jinx's boundless creativity.



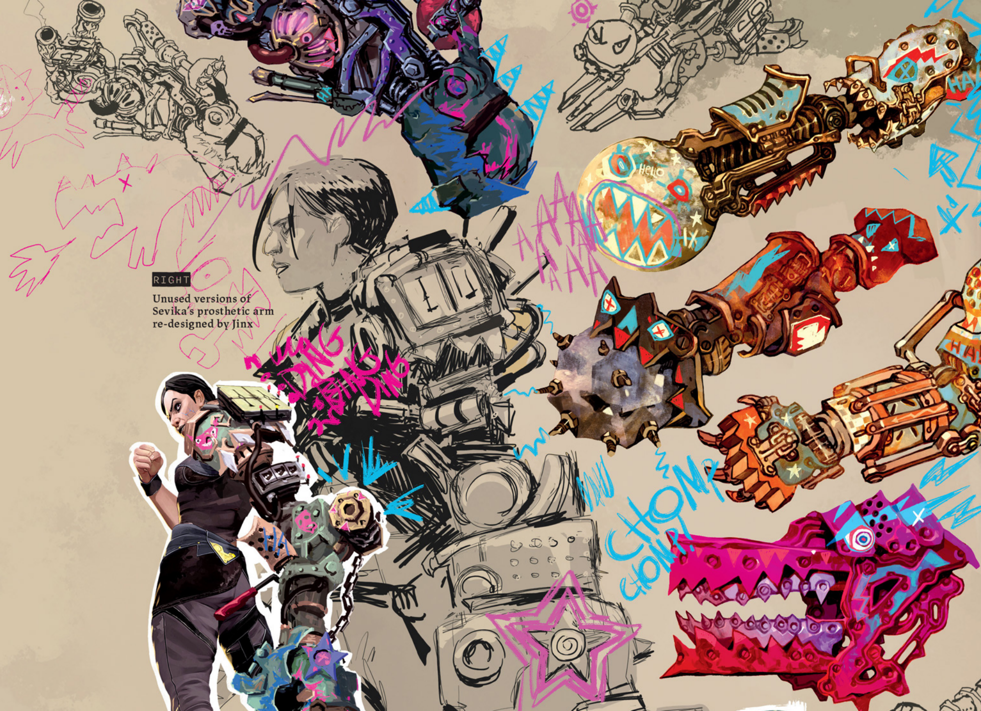


TOP AND MIDDLE

Concept art for Chem-baron Finn

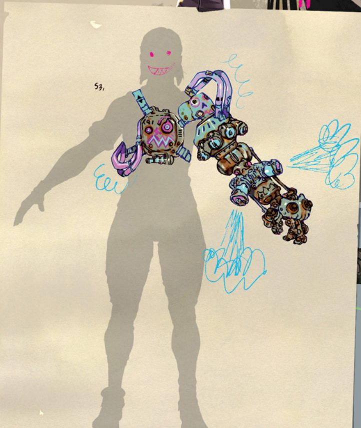
BOTTOM

Texture model with Vi's full back tattoo



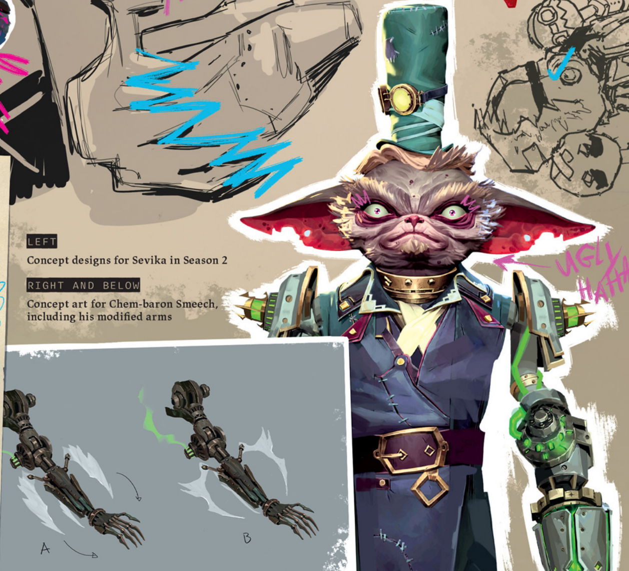
RIGHT

Unused versions of Sevika's prosthetic arm re-designed by Jinx



LEFT

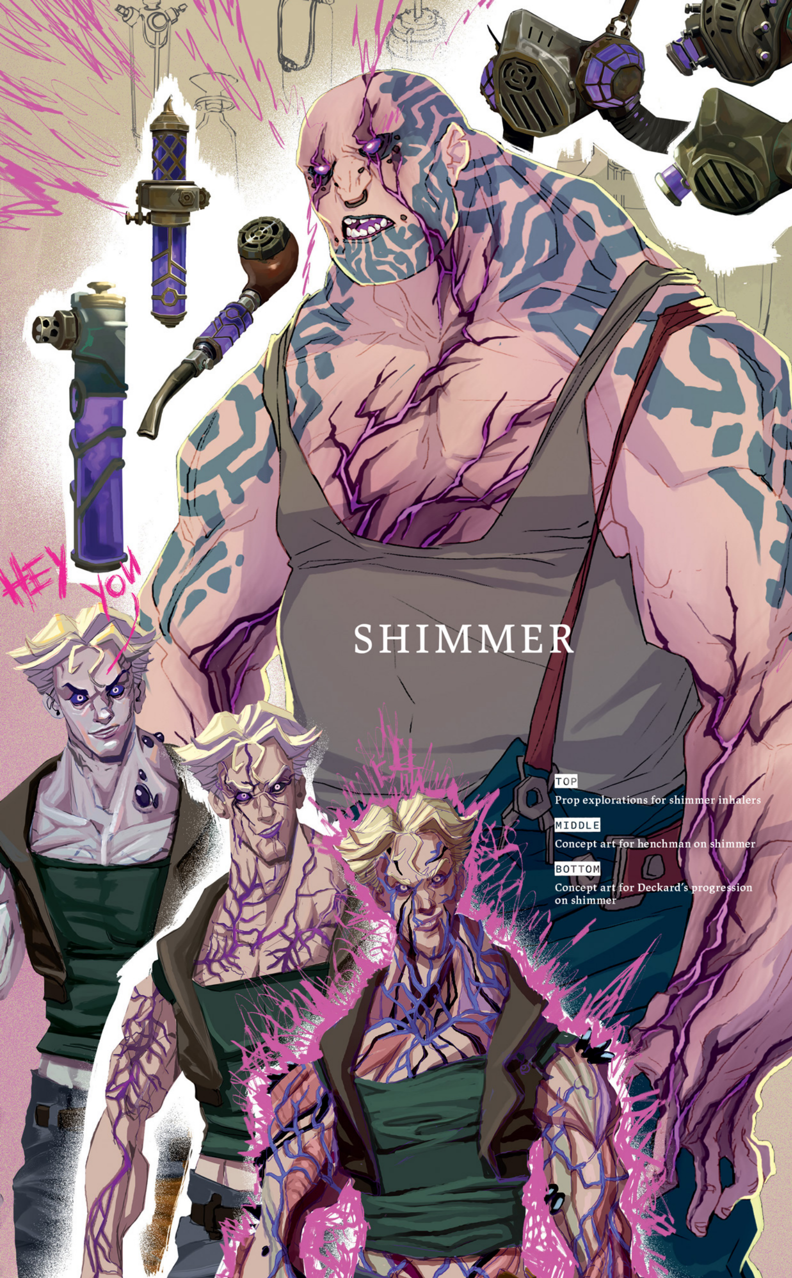
Concept designs for Sevika in Season 2

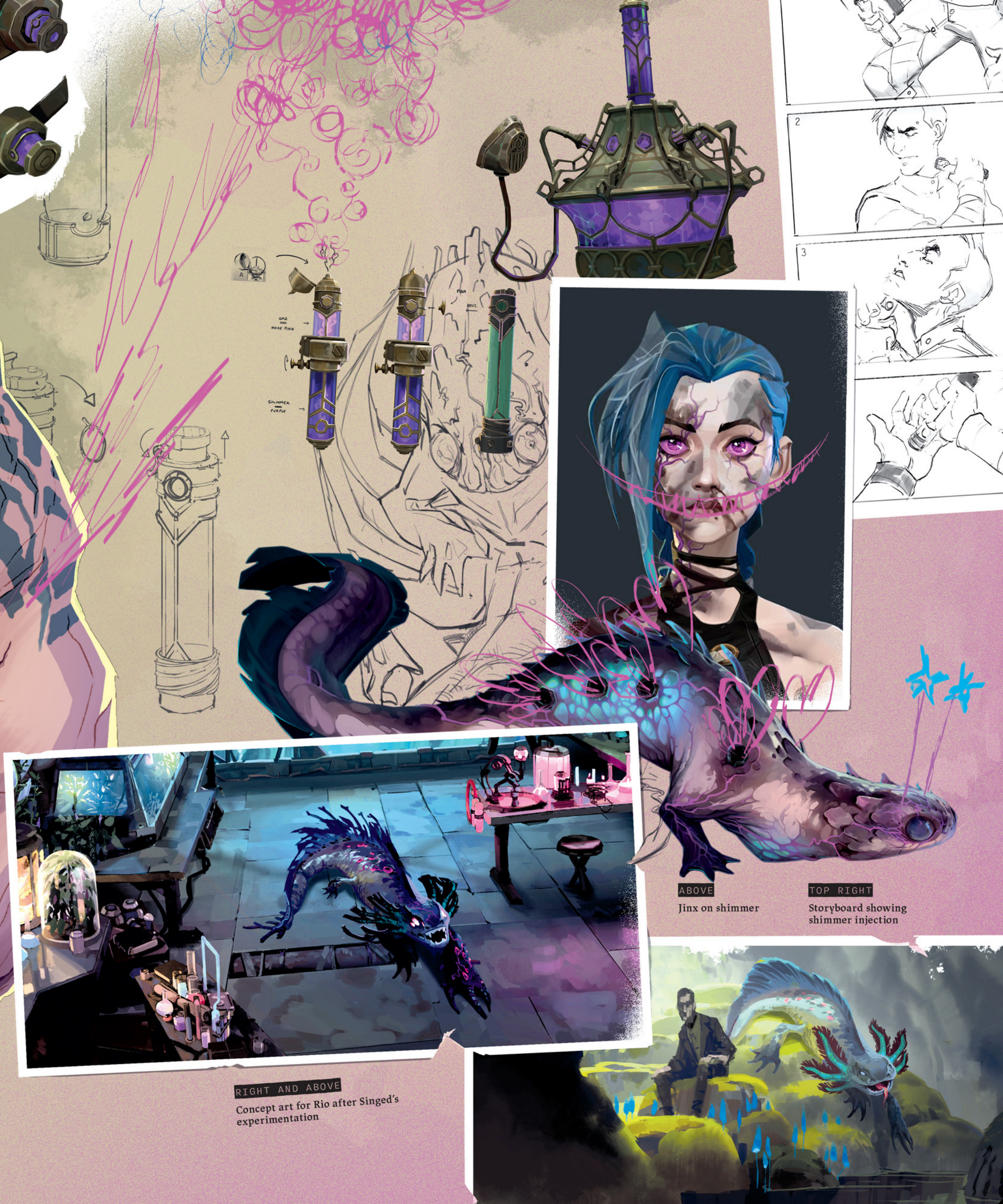


RIGHT AND BELOW

Concept art for Chem-baron Smeech, including his modified arms

SHIMMER





TOP
Prop explorations for shimmer inhalers

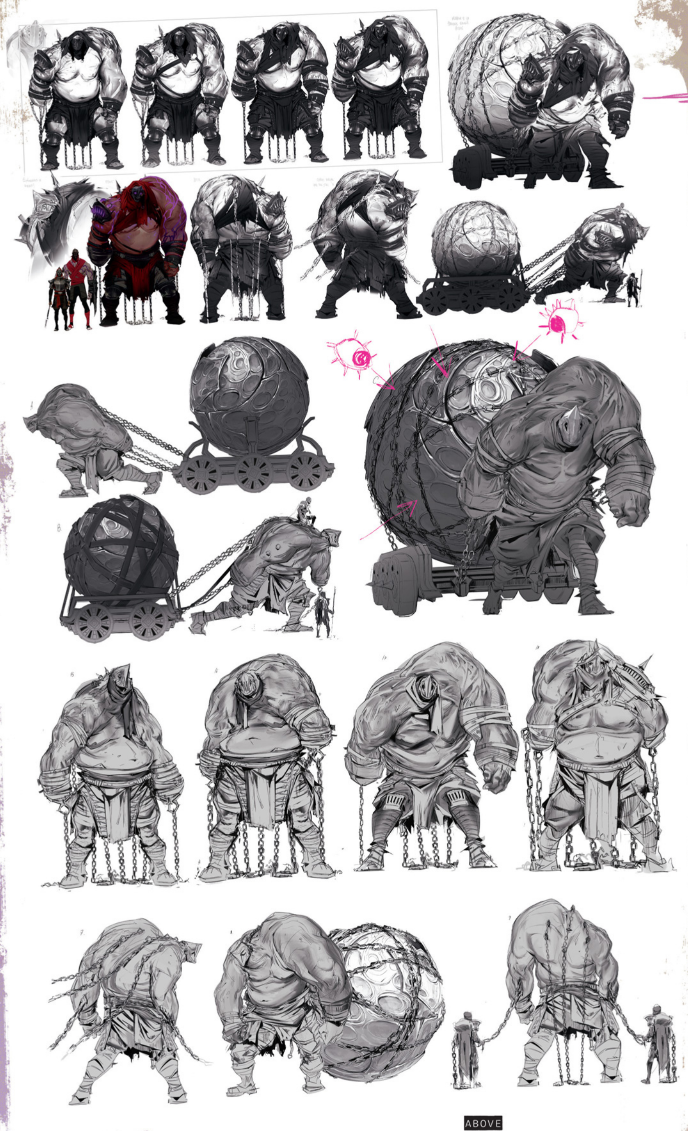
MIDDLE
Concept art for henchman on shimmer

BOTTOM
Concept art for Deckard's progression on shimmer

ABOVE
Jinx on shimmer

TOP RIGHT
Storyboard showing shimmer injection

RIGHT AND ABOVE
Concept art for Rio after Singed's experimentation

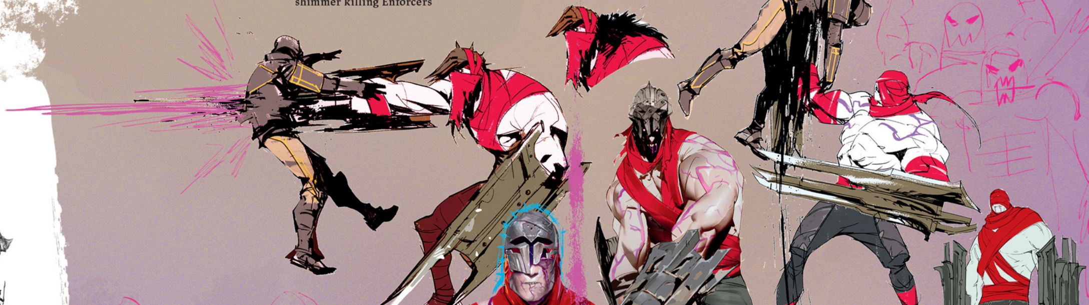


ABOVE

Various concept designs for Noxian berserkers

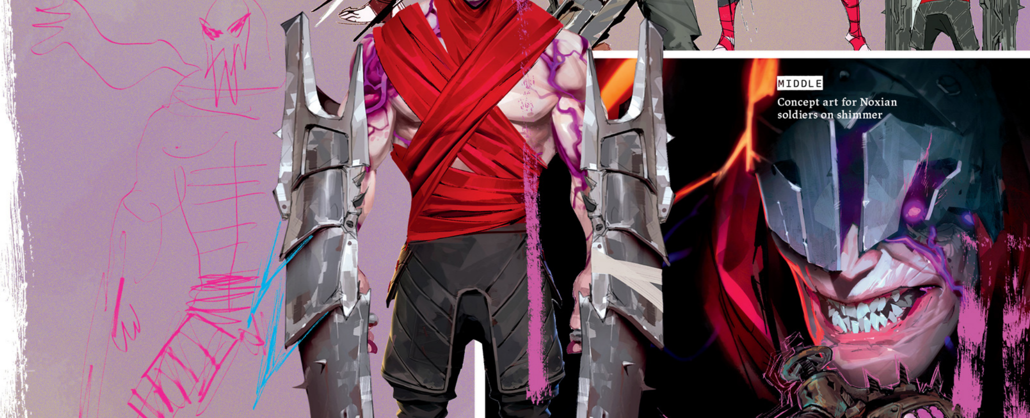
BELOW

Concept art for Noxian soldiers on shimmer killing Enforcers



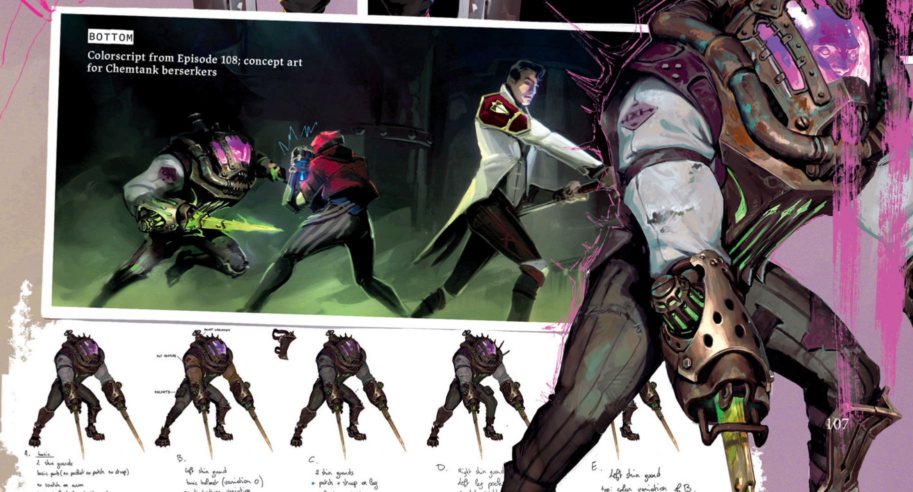
MIDDLE

Concept art for Noxian soldiers on shimmer



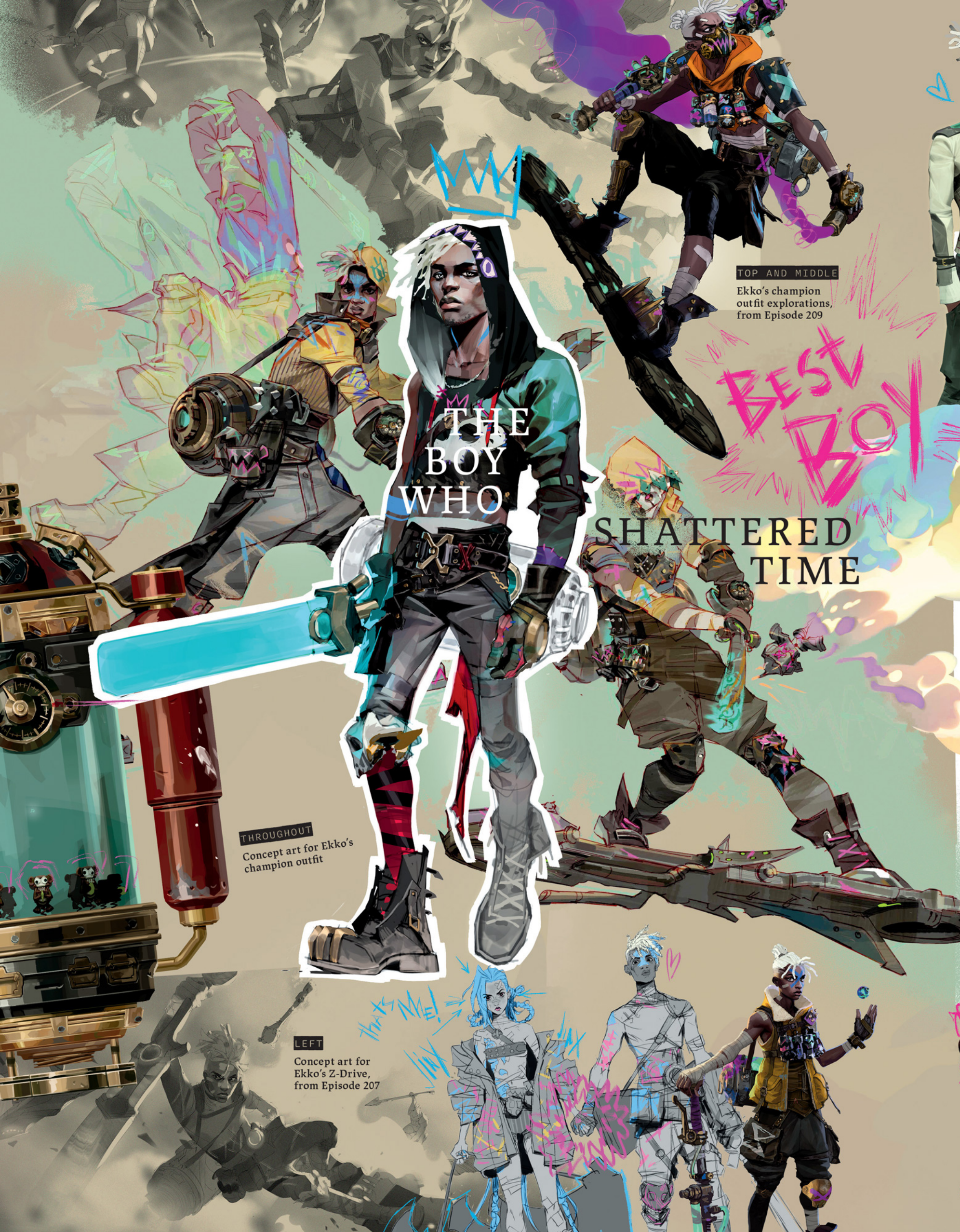
BOTTOM

Colorscript from Episode 108; concept art for Chemtank berserkers



POCKETS
A. basic
2 shin guards
basic pants (no pockets no patch no strap)
no scratch on arm
B.
left shin guard
basic helmet (variation 0)
C.
2 shin guards
patch + strap on leg
D. Right shin guard
left leg pocke
E.
left shin guard
top: color variation of B.

THE BOY WHO SHATTERED TIME



TOP AND MIDDLE

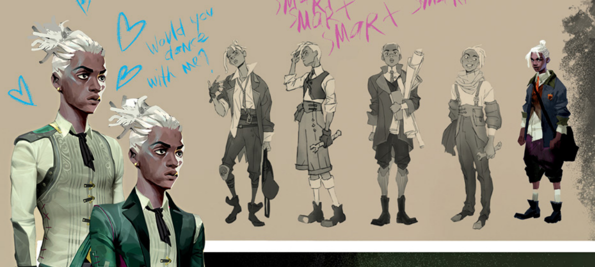
Ekko's champion outfit explorations, from Episode 209

THROUGHOUT

Concept art for Ekko's champion outfit

LEFT

Concept art for Ekko's Z-Drive, from Episode 207


Would you dance with me?
SMART SMART SMART

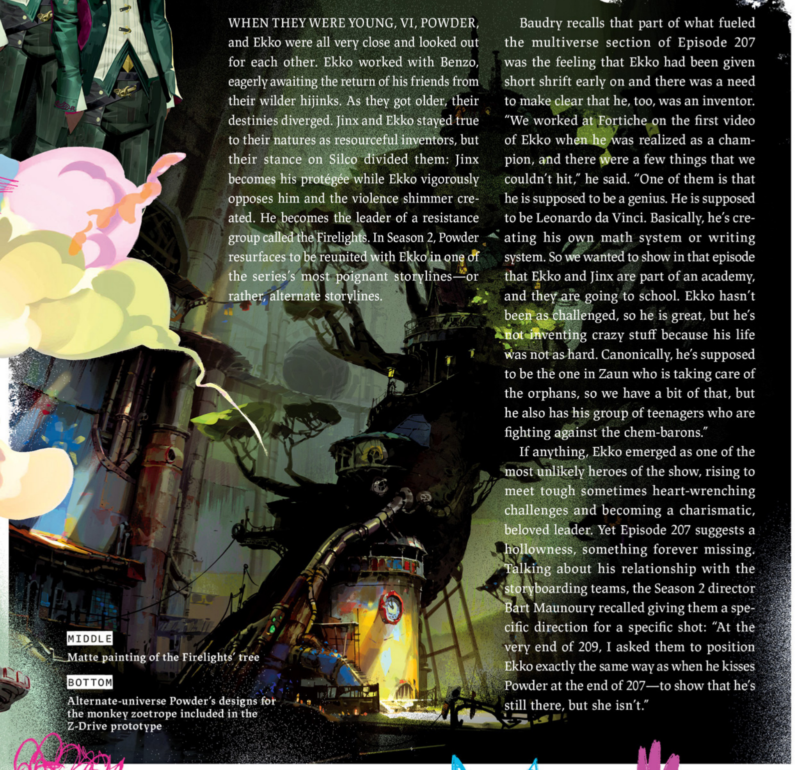
LEFT

Concept art for alternate-universe student Ekko, from Episode 207

WHEN THEY WERE YOUNG, VI, POWDER, and Ekko were all very close and looked out for each other. Ekko worked with Benzo, eagerly awaiting the return of his friends from their wilder hijinks. As they got older, their destinies diverged. Jinx and Ekko stayed true to their natures as resourceful inventors, but their stance on Silco divided them: Jinx becomes his protégée while Ekko vigorously opposes him and the violence shimmer created. He becomes the leader of a resistance group called the Firelights. In Season 2, Powder resurfaces to be reunited with Ekko in one of the series's most poignant storylines—or rather, alternate storylines.

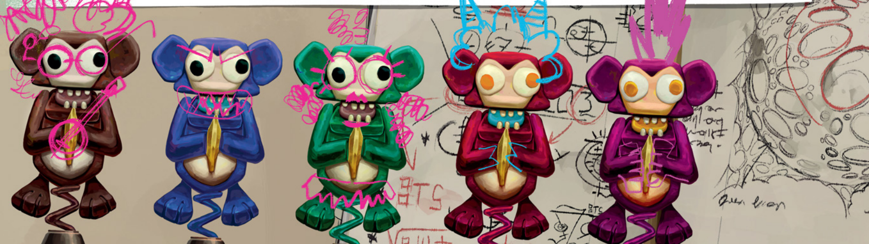
Baudry recalls that part of what fueled the multiverse section of Episode 207 was the feeling that Ekko had been given short shrift early on and there was a need to make clear that he, too, was an inventor. "We worked at Fortiche on the first video of Ekko when he was realized as a champion, and there were a few things that we couldn't hit," he said. "One of them is that he is supposed to be a genius. He is supposed to be Leonardo da Vinci. Basically, he's creating his own math system or writing system. So we wanted to show in that episode that Ekko and Jinx are part of an academy, and they are going to school. Ekko hasn't been as challenged, so he is great, but he's not inventing crazy stuff because his life was not as hard. Canonically, he's supposed to be the one in Zaun who is taking care of the orphans, so we have a bit of that, but he also has his group of teenagers who are fighting against the chem-barons."

If anything, Ekko emerged as one of the most unlikely heroes of the show, rising to meet tough sometimes heart-wrenching challenges and becoming a charismatic, beloved leader. Yet Episode 207 suggests a hollowness, something forever missing. Talking about his relationship with the storyboarding teams, the Season 2 director Bart Maunoury recalled giving them a specific direction for a specific shot: "At the very end of 209, I asked them to position Ekko exactly the same way as when he kisses Powder at the end of 207—to show that he's still there, but she isn't."



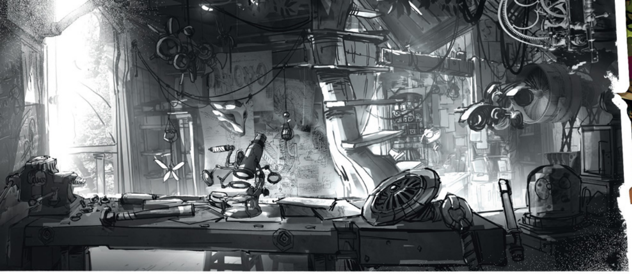
MIDDLE

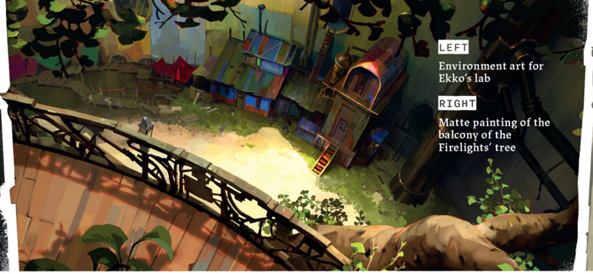
Matte painting of the Firelights' tree



BOTTOM

Alternate-universe Powder's designs for the monkey zoetrope included in the Z-Drive prototype





LEFT

Environment art for Ekko's lab

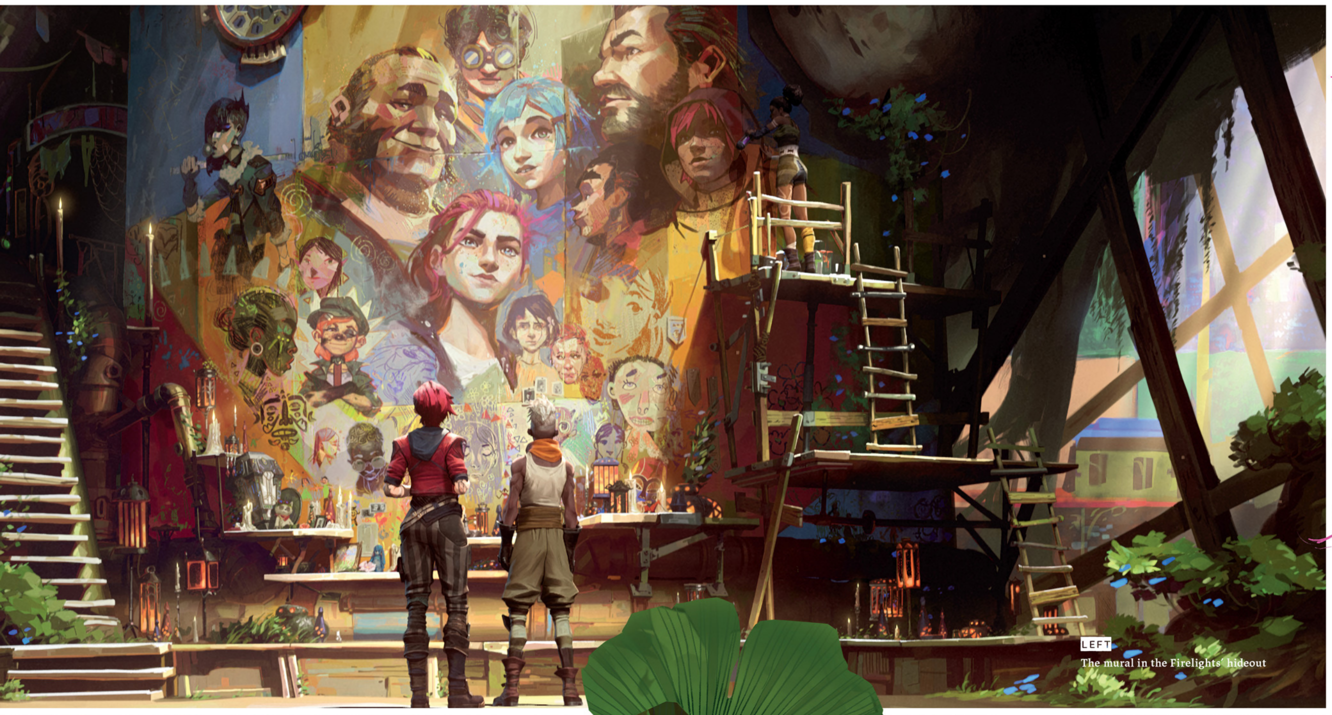
RIGHT

Matte painting of the balcony of the Firelights' tree

THE FIRELIGHTS' ENCLAVE

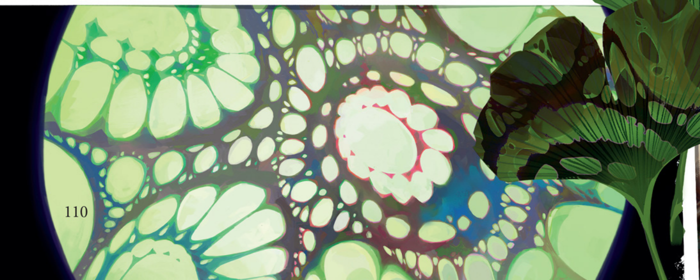
THE FIRELIGHTS STAND OUT IN ZAUN, YET feel very much a part of it. By looking out for the city's weak and downtrodden—they try to block the spread of shimmer, for example—they display a sense of solidarity. Led by Ekko, the Firelights congregate at a hideout dominated by a majestic tree. That place is a refuge for outcasts within Zaun, a haven where those looking for a purpose, or pursuing one, can find each other. Even Heimerdinger ends up there in Season 2.

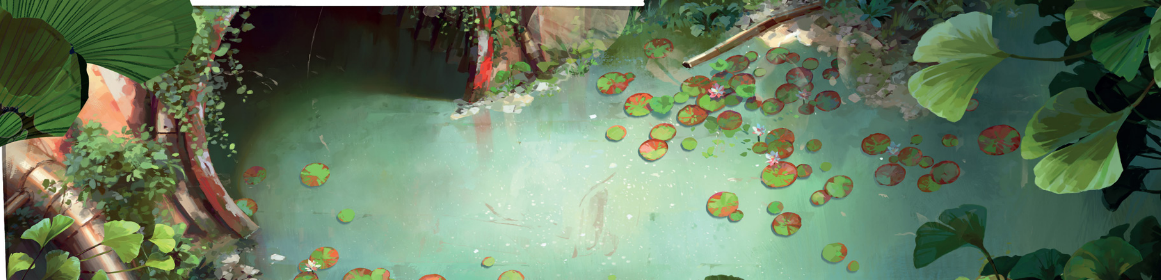
Naturally, the Firelights have a distinct identity, strongly linked to street art, graffiti, and music. They also played a key part when it comes to one of *Arcane*'s signatures: the punctuation of each episode with at least one music-video-like sequence that coalesced in 107, which is important in Ekko and Firelights lore. Fortiche came up with the idea of a music montage for more efficient storytelling and changed what was originally written. "The beginning of that episode, where it has this sort of music video intro of the Firelight is totally different from what's in the script," Yee said. I think it's one of the moments where it felt like Fortiche was beginning to say 'We want to kind of depart from the script, we want to do something we've got a vision for.'"



LEFT

The mural in the Firelights' hideout





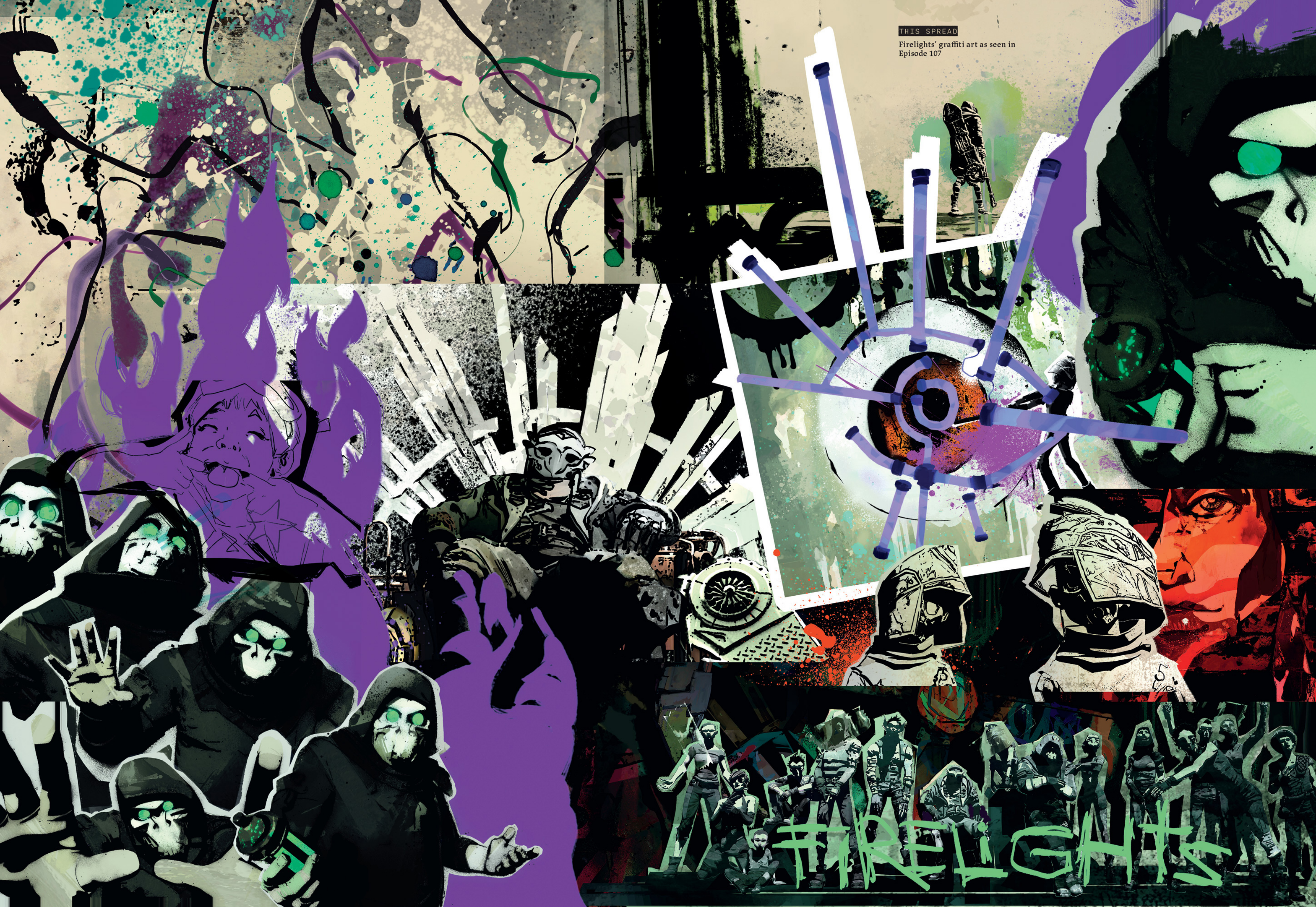
FIRELIGHTS TRUST LOVE PROTECT

FRIENDSHIP HOME REMEMBER

SAFETY

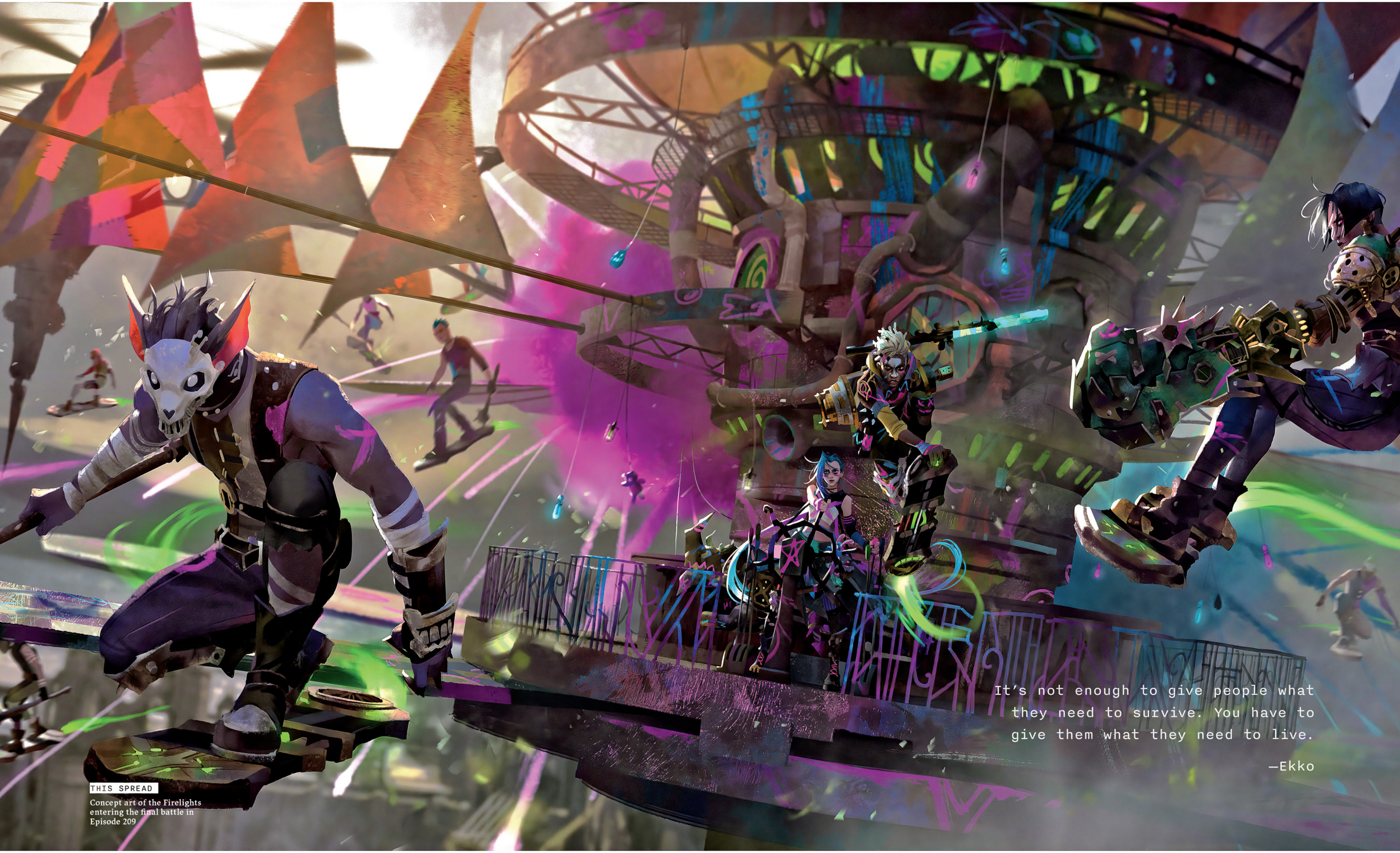
BOTTOM, FROM LEFT

Effect of the Anomaly on plants at the Firelights' base; matte painting of the alternate-universe Firelights base from 207


FIRELIGHTS

THIS SPREAD

Firelights' graffiti art as seen in Episode 107



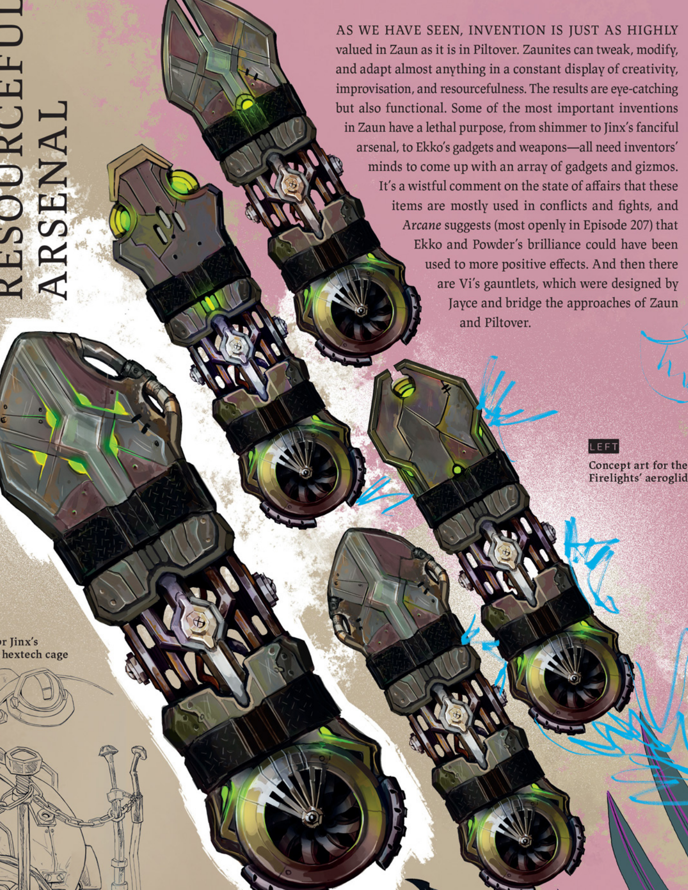
THIS SPREAD

Concept art of the Firelights entering the final battle in Episode 209

> It's not enough to give people what they need to survive. You have to give them what they need to live.
>
> —Ekko

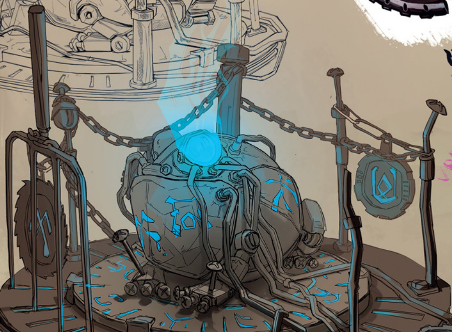
A RESOURCEFUL ARSENAL

AS WE HAVE SEEN, INVENTION IS JUST AS HIGHLY valued in Zaun as it is in Piltover. Zaunites can tweak, modify, and adapt almost anything in a constant display of creativity, improvisation, and resourcefulness. The results are eye-catching but also functional. Some of the most important inventions in Zaun have a lethal purpose, from shimmer to Jinx's fanciful arsenal, to Ekko's gadgets and weapons—all need inventors' minds to come up with an array of gadgets and gizmos. It's a wistful comment on the state of affairs that these items are mostly used in conflicts and fights, and *Arcane* suggests (most openly in Episode 207) that Ekko and Powder's brilliance could have been used to more positive effects. And then there are Vi's gauntlets, which were designed by Jayce and bridge the approaches of Zaun and Piltover.



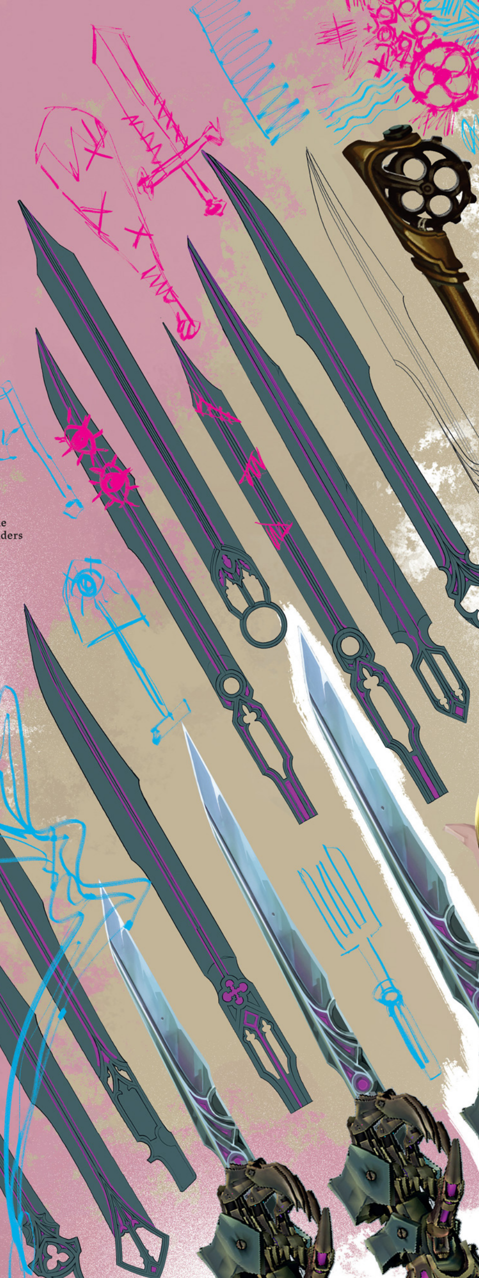
LEFT

Concept art for the Firelights' aerogliders



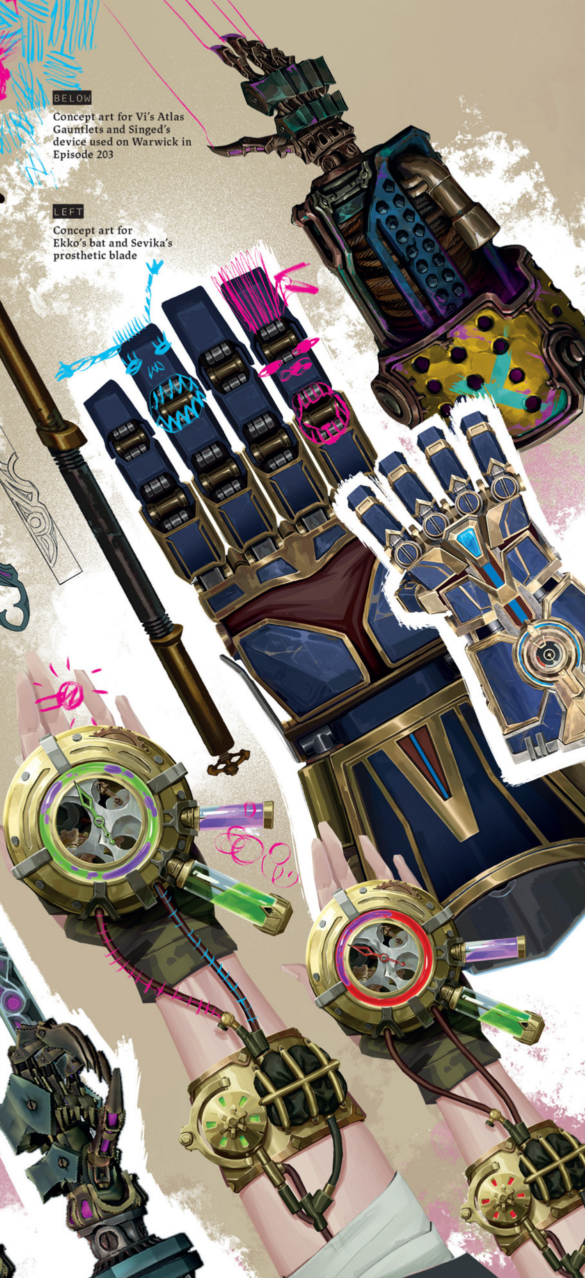
BELOW

Concept art for Jinx's version of the hextech cage



LEFT

Concept art for Ekko's bat and Sevika's prosthetic blade

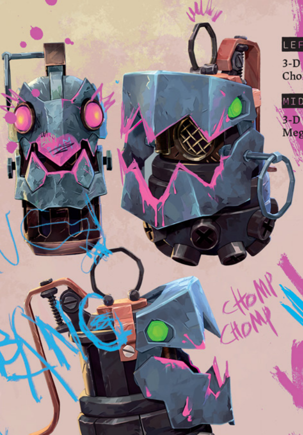


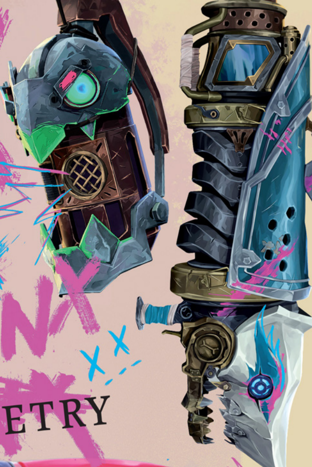
BELOW

Concept art for Vi's Atlas Gauntlets and Singed's device used on Warwick in Episode 203

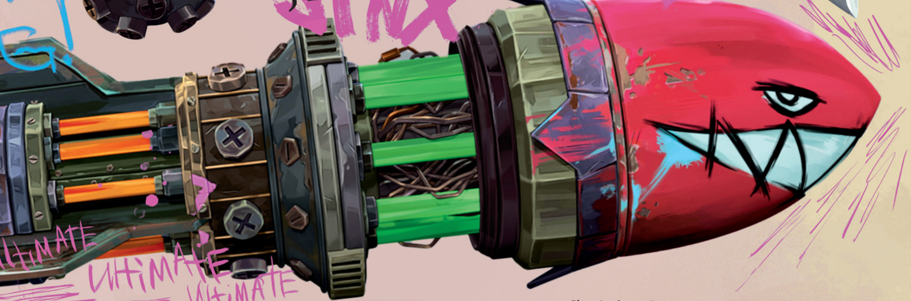
LEFT
3-D render for Jinx's Chomper Grenades

MIDDLE
3-D render for the Super Mega Death Rocket





JINX'S GADGETRY

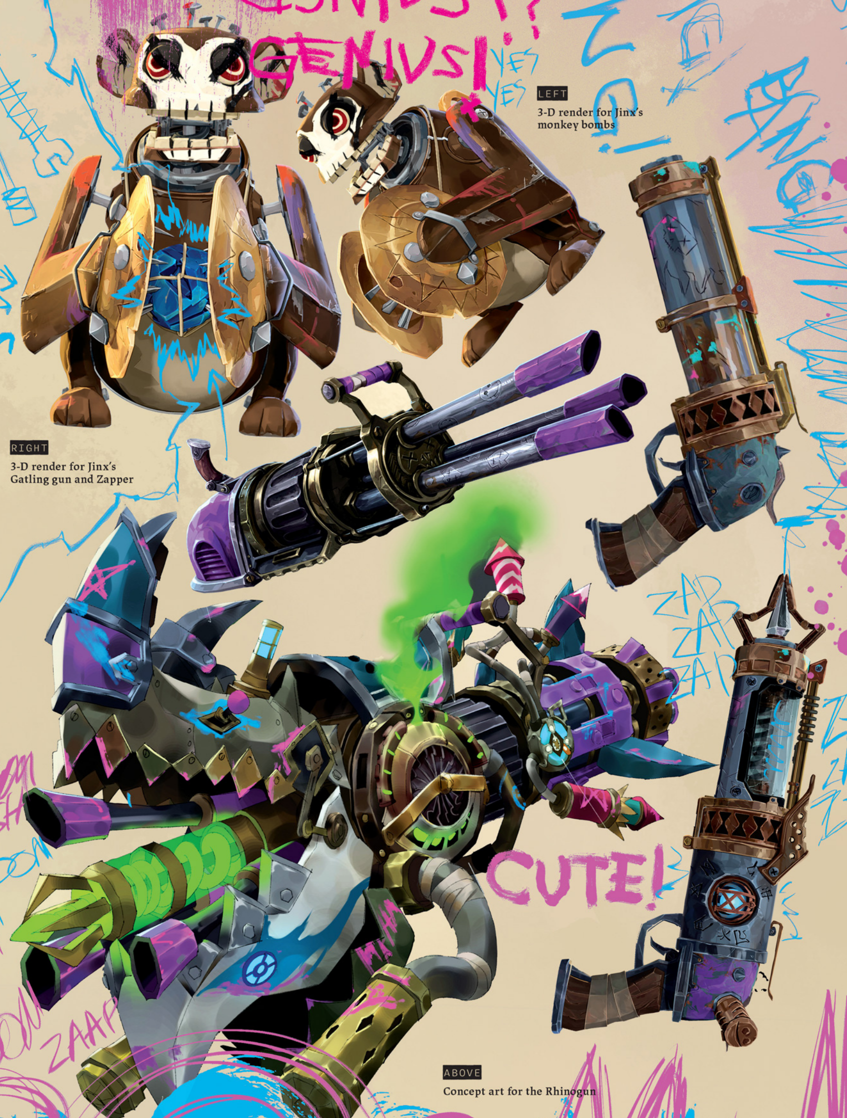


AS A MAJOR PART OF *LEAGUE OF LEGENDS*, WEAPONS form extensive connective tissue with *Arcane*. "They are really important elements for the champions, and they're all different from the ones in the game," said Arnaud-Loris Baudry. "We had to sell the fantasy of each character and that can take a lot of time. For example, I worked on most of the weapons of Jinx. Her Gatling gun was probably two or three months of work, with back and forth between everyone to make sure that it works properly. Fishbones is a rocket launcher that looks like a shark and it existed in the game. I actually worked on it when I was doing 'Get Jinxed' ten years ago, but I wanted our version to be a bit different. It took literally months of back and forth."

Fishbones itself is Hextech, while the Super Mega Death Rocket that it launches is chemtech. "When you play the game, each character has four abilities and that's the biggest one, that's the top one," Baudry said. "Something interesting is that Jinx is the only character who by the end of Season 1 is almost the champion she is in the game: She has her grenades, her Gatling gun, her missile. It's only her rocket that she didn't have."

One of Jinx's signature jury-rigged devices is her monkey bomb, which comes into major play in the series's finale. "She made this bomb and it's a mishmash of things you've seen," said Jason Chan, a visual development artist at Riot Games who worked closely with Fortiche. "The head actually is the monkey bomb that started everything—the way it's put together, it almost looks like a teddy bear. She sticks the Hex-gem in the middle and it hugs itself. It's a sad bomb, a sad little mix of a teddy bear and made-up things that remind you of different parts in her arc."

BOOOOOM
WHOOOOOSH
BOOOOOOM
ZAPP

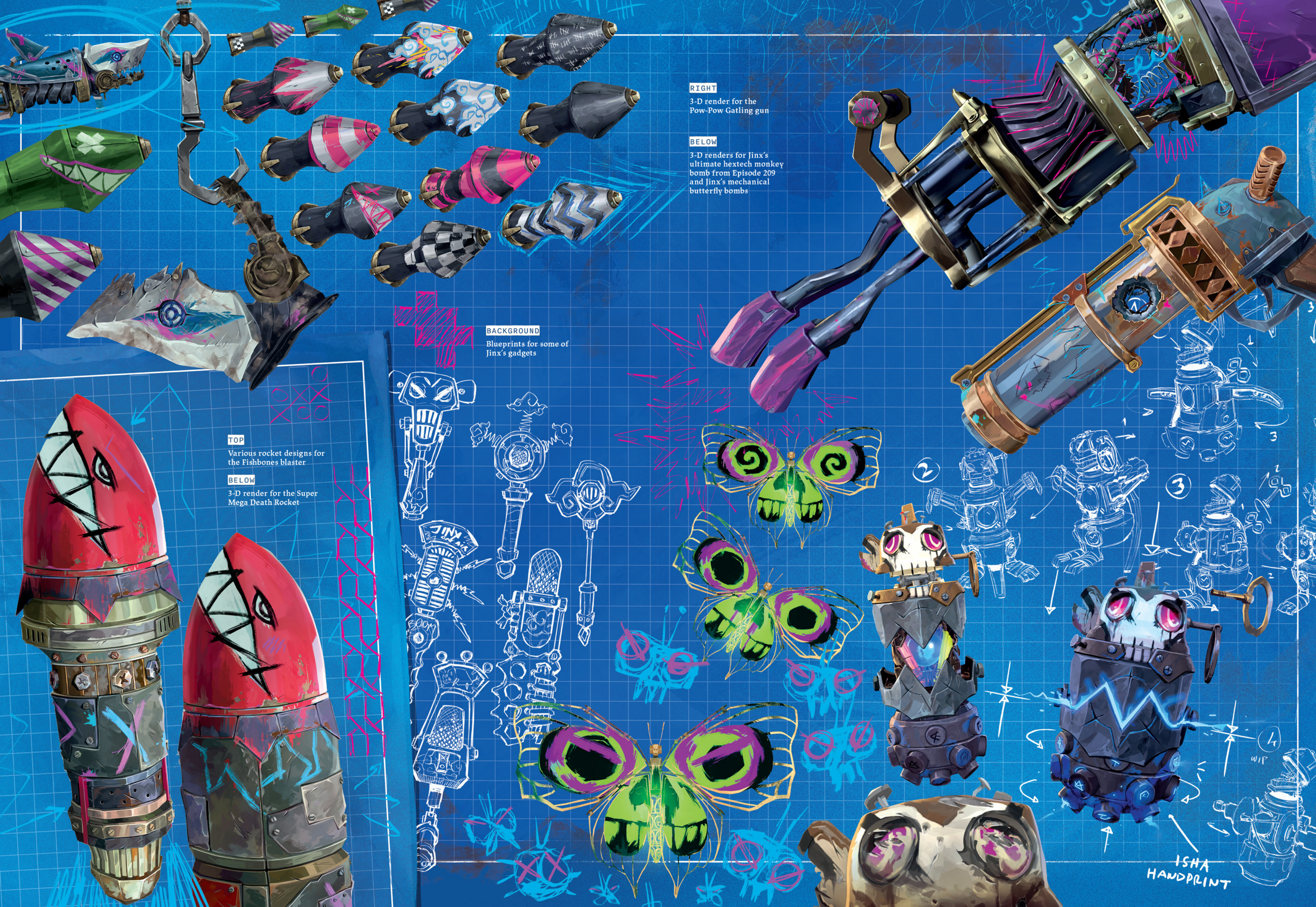


LEFT
3-D render for Jinx's monkey bombs

RIGHT
3-D render for Jinx's Gatling gun and Zapper

ABOVE
Concept art for the Rhinogun

BOOOOOOOOOM



TOP

Various rocket designs for the Fishbones blaster

BELOW

3-D render for the Super Mega Death Rocket

BACKGROUND

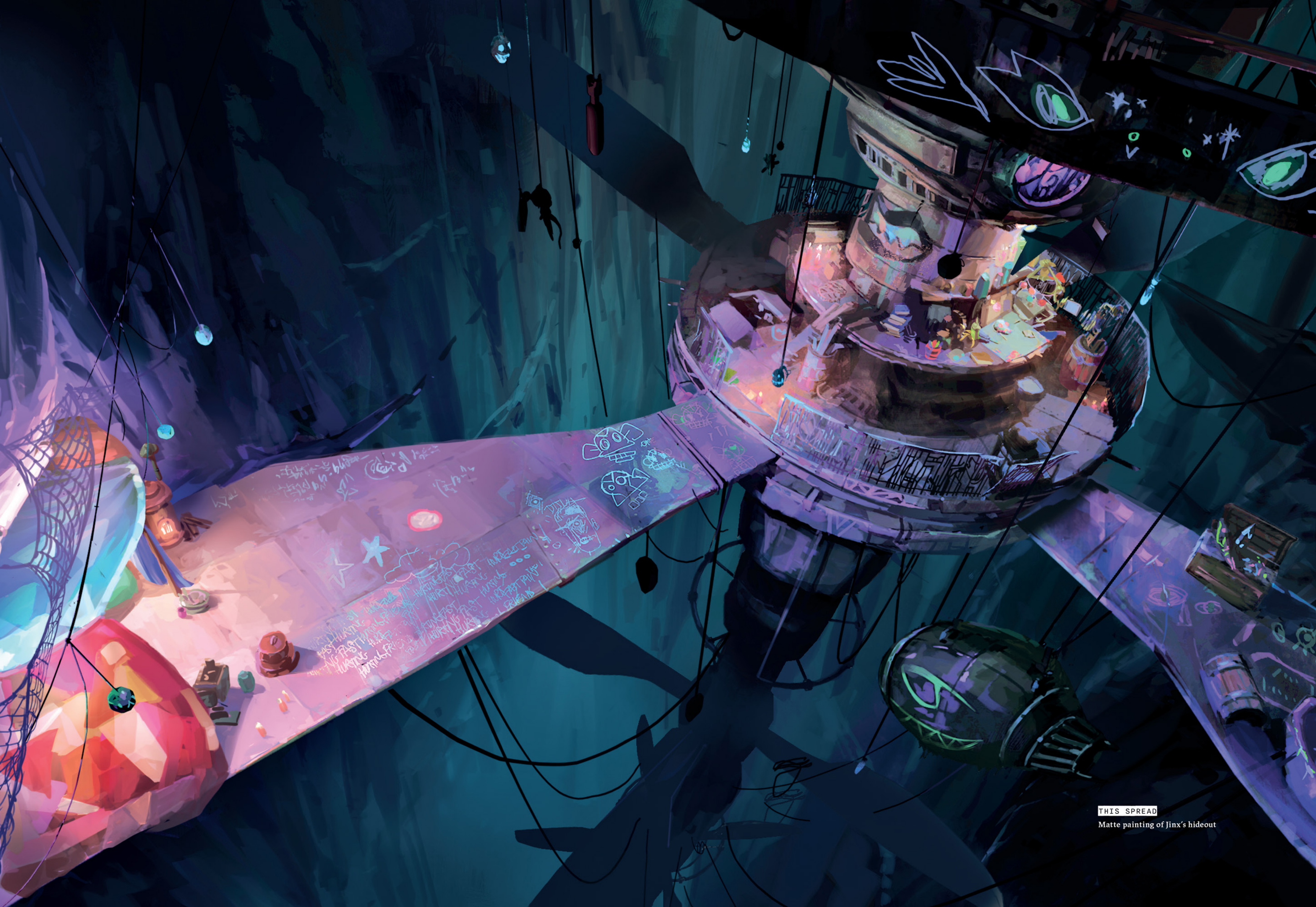
Blueprints for some of Jinx's gadgets

RIGHT

3-D render for the Pow-Pow Gatling gun

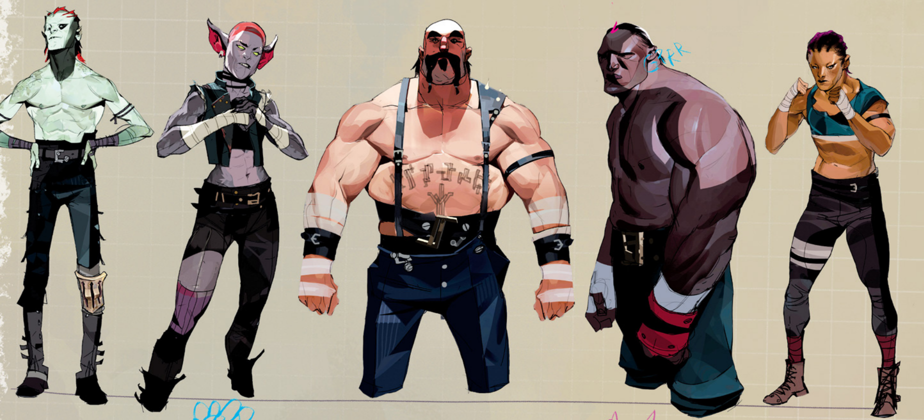
BELOW

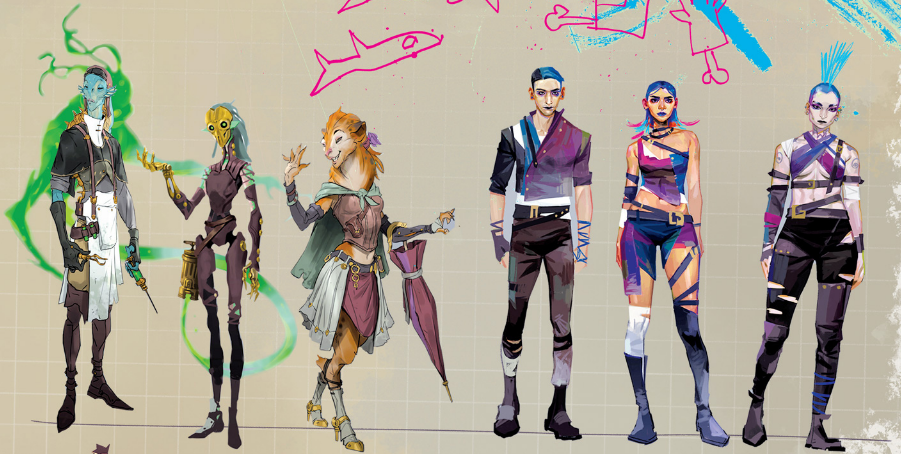
3-D renders for Jinx's ultimate hextech monkey bomb from Episode 209 and Jinx's mechanical butterfly bombs

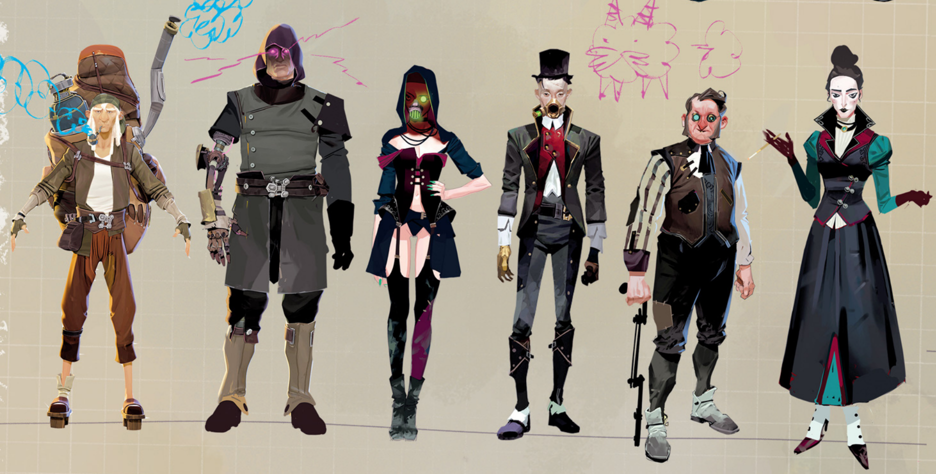


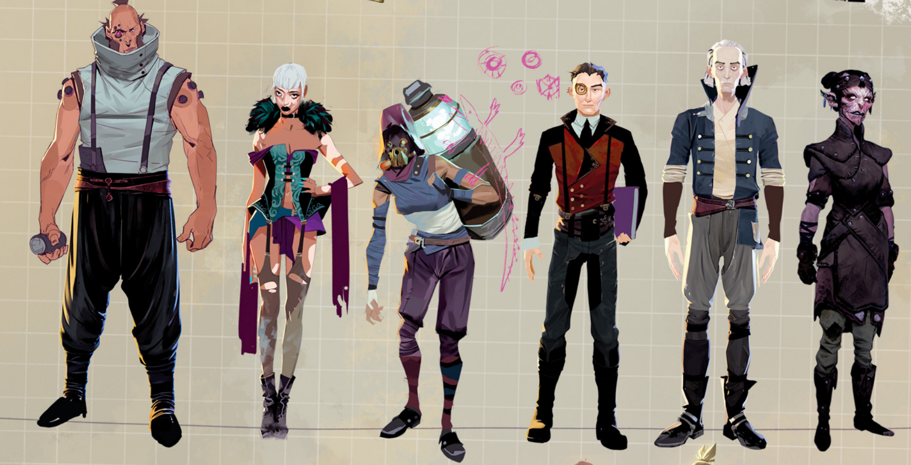
THIS SPREAD

Matte painting of Jinx's hideout



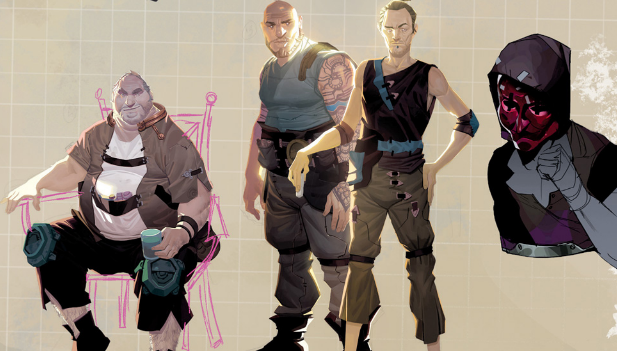


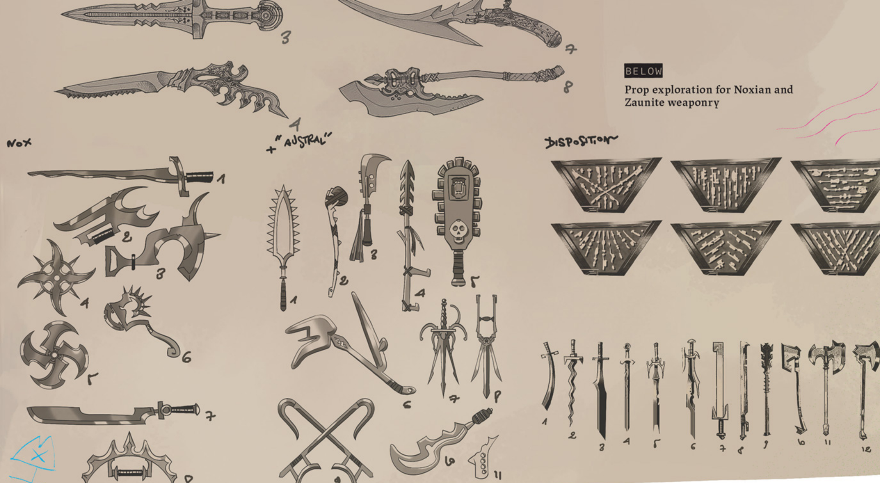




A MOTLEY CREW

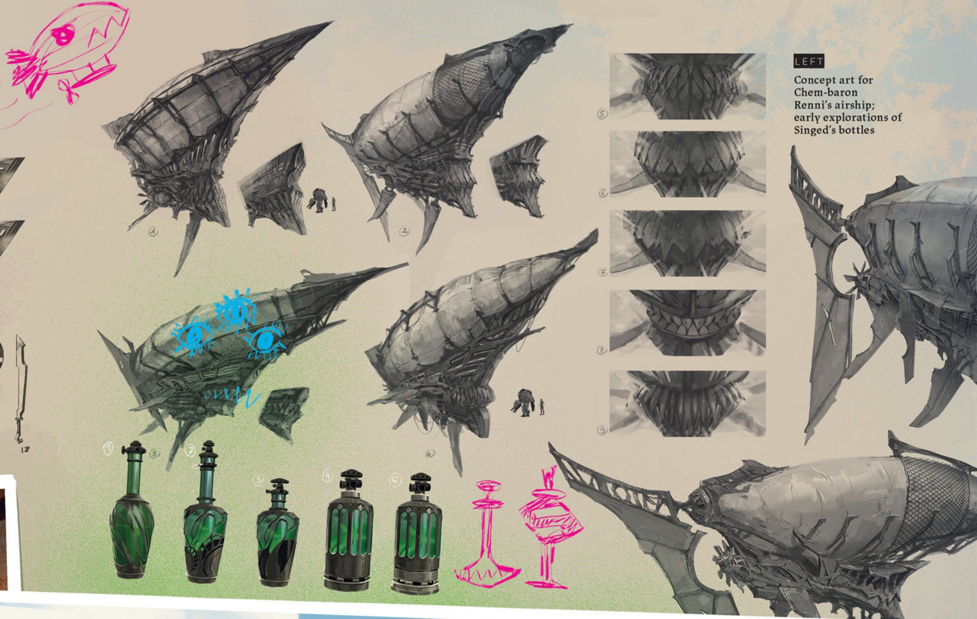
TAKE A LOOK AT THE CITIZENS OF ZAUN WHO were designed for the series and were built up into their final portrayals or other characters entirely.





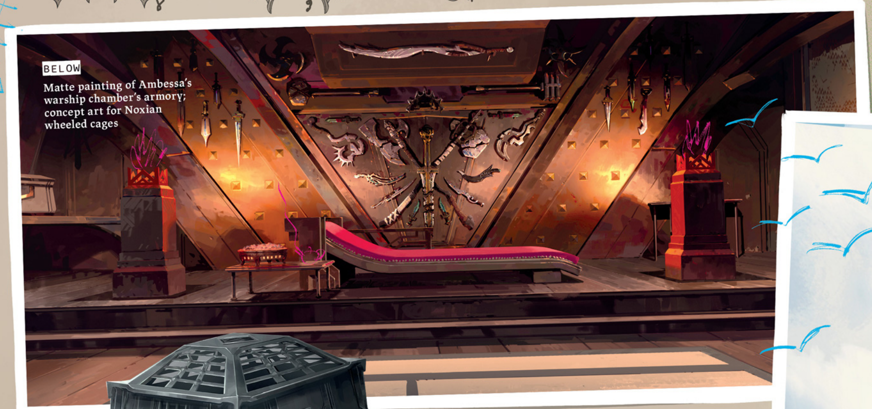
BELOW

Prop exploration for Noxian and Zaunite weaponry



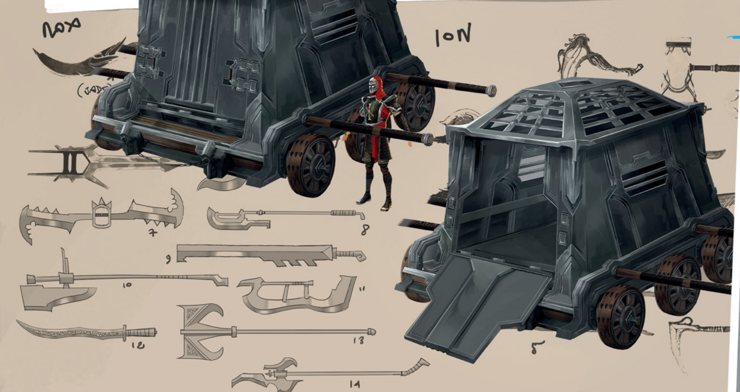
LEFT

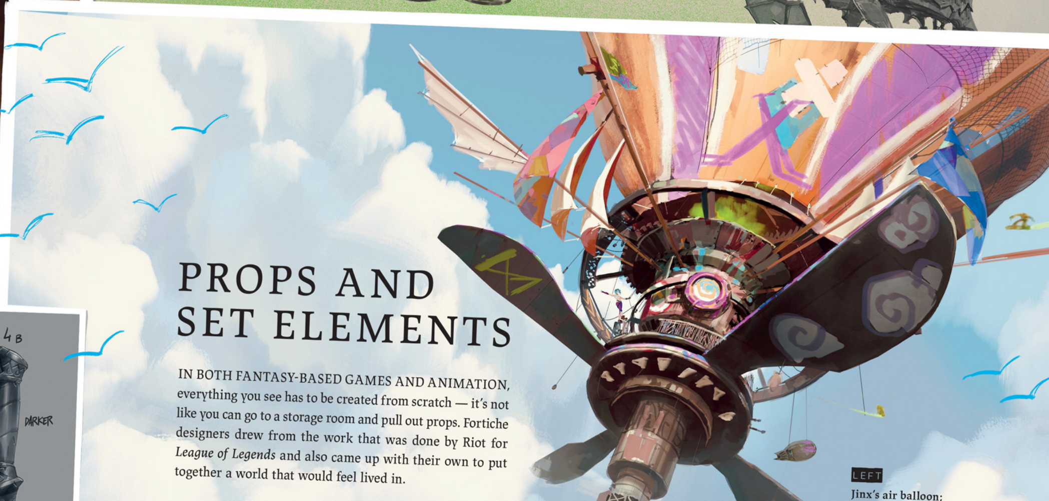
Concept art for Chem-baron Renni's airship; early explorations of Singed's bottles



BELOW

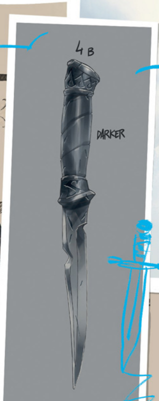
Matte painting of Ambessa's warship chamber's armory; concept art for Noxian wheeled cages





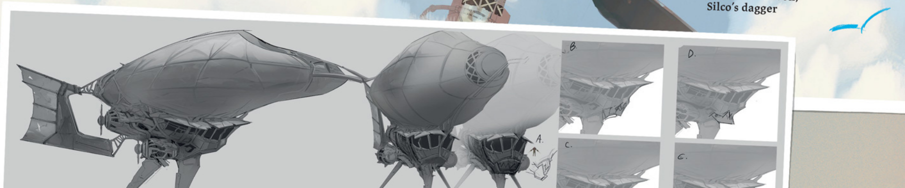
PROPS AND SET ELEMENTS

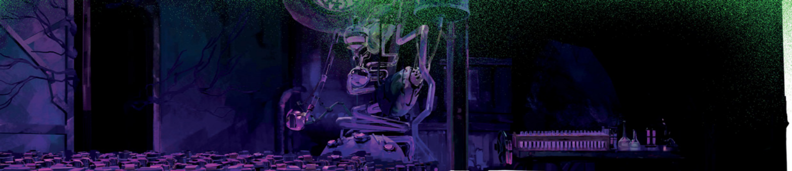
IN BOTH FANTASY-BASED GAMES AND ANIMATION, everything you see has to be created from scratch — it's not like you can go to a storage room and pull out props. Fortiche designers drew from the work that was done by Riot for *League of Legends* and also came up with their own to put together a world that would feel lived in.

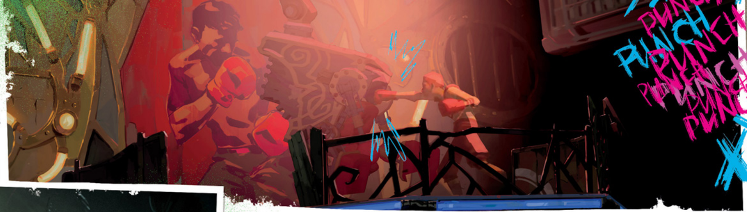


LEFT

Jinx's air balloon; Silco's dagger






PUNCH
PUNCH
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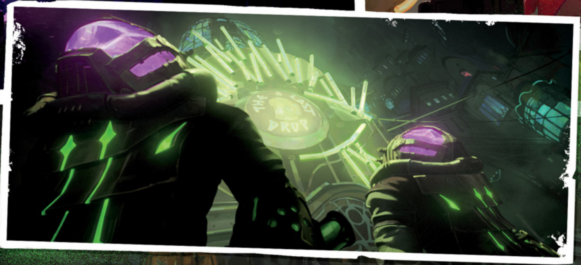
PUNCH
X

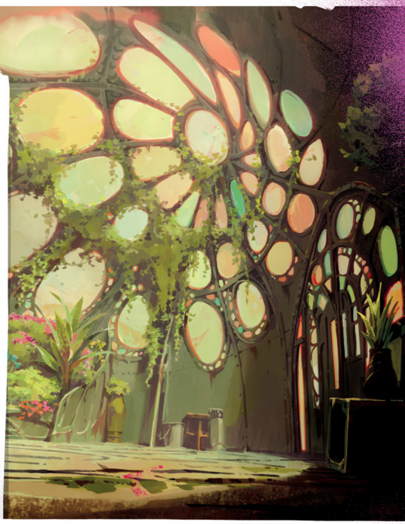
TOP, FROM LEFT

The shimmer laboratory; Vi's boxing ring

BELOW

Luxurious vegetation in the greenhouse of Viktor's commune



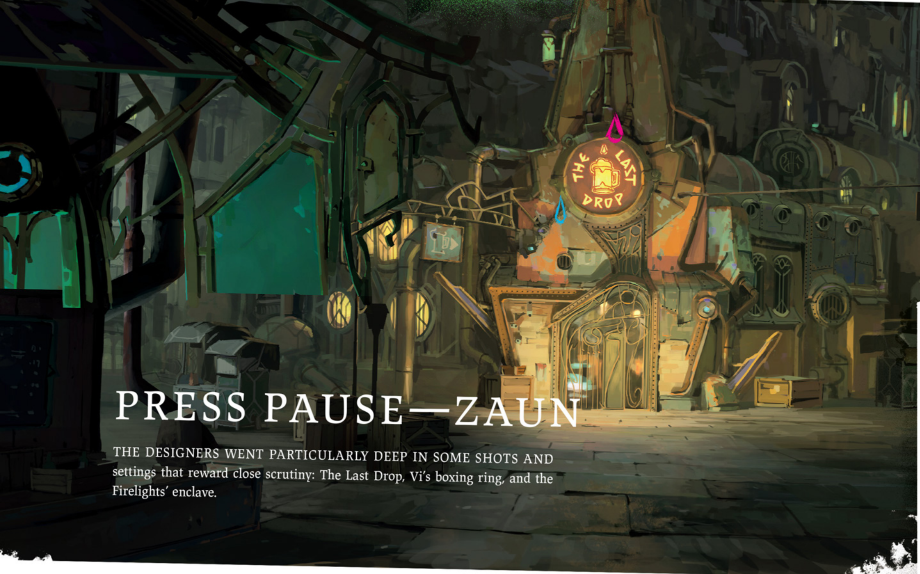


LEFT

The Last Drop under Silco's ownership

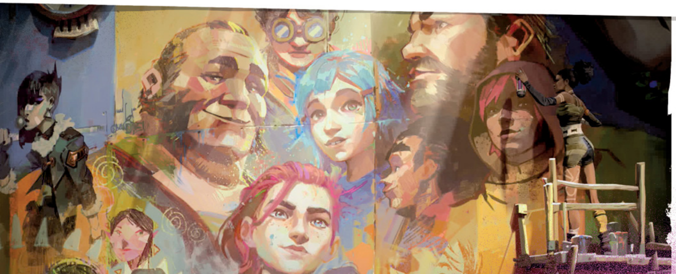
BELOW

The Last Drop under Vander's ownership


THE LAST DROP

PRESS PAUSE—ZAUN

THE DESIGNERS WENT PARTICULARLY DEEP IN SOME SHOTS AND settings that reward close scrutiny: The Last Drop, Vi's boxing ring, and the Firelights' enclave.

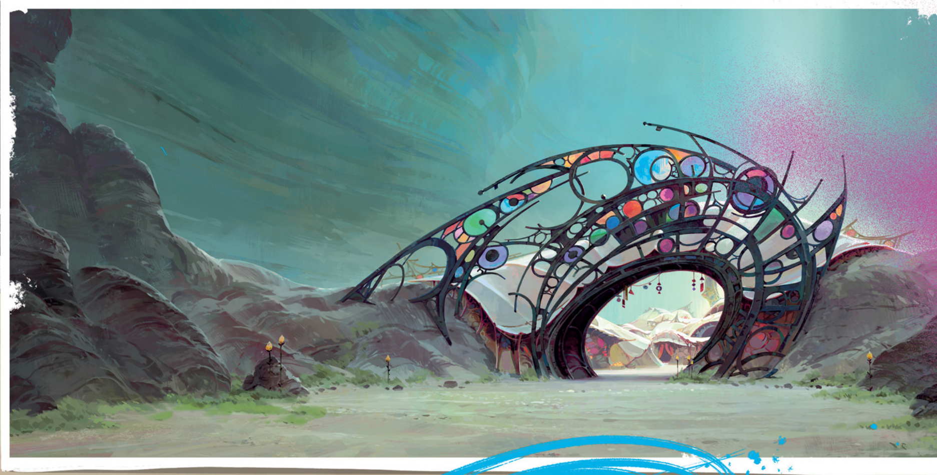


LEFT

Ekko's mural honoring the fallen

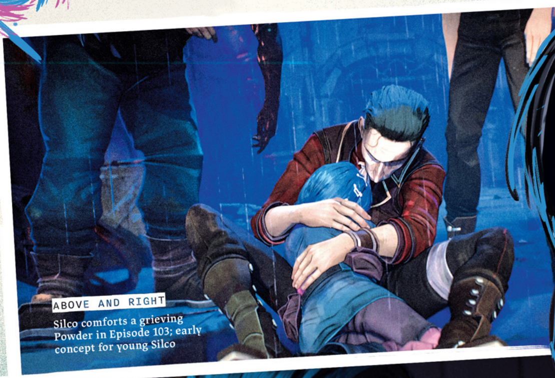
RIGHT

Entrance to Viktor's commune



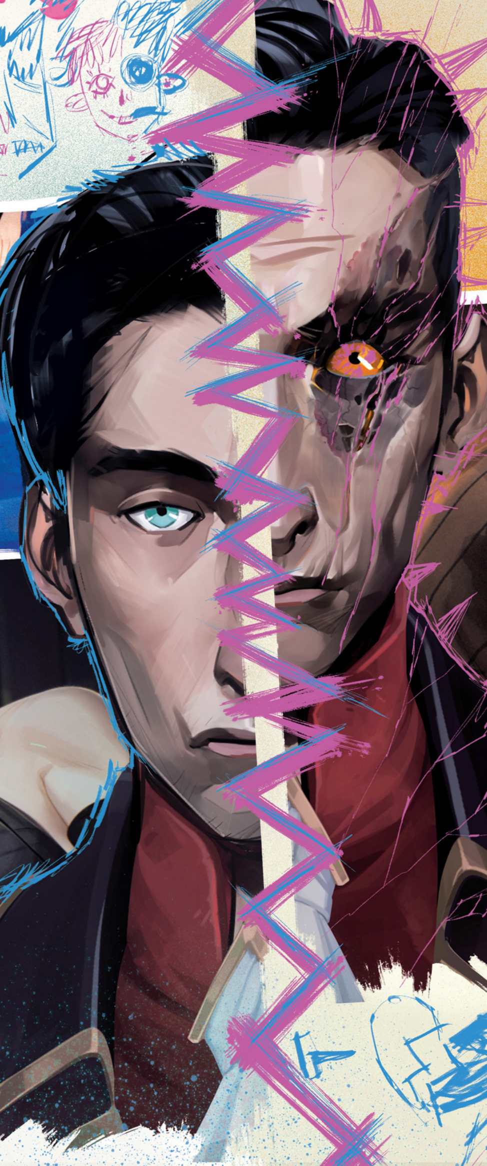
5 DUALITIES

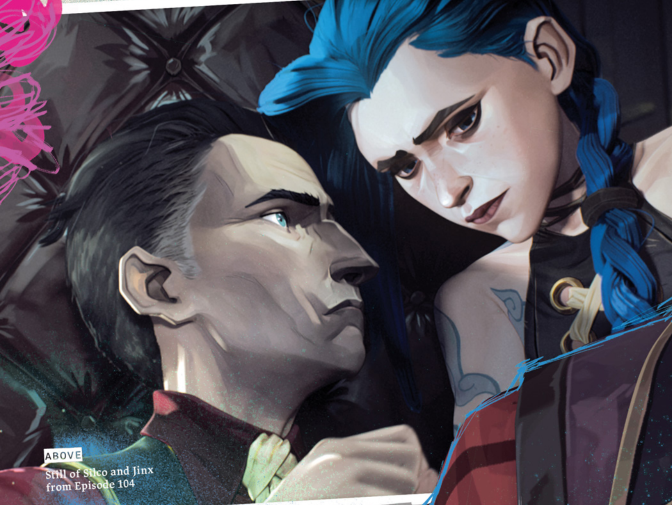
THE THEME OF DUALITIES IS NOT LIMITED TO PILTOVER AND ZAUN BUT EXTENDS to nearly all of the characters, and even the overall story's structure. One of the strengths of *Arcane* is the serious-minded, emotional, often empathetic way in which it portrays the psychology of each character—an approach that is reflected in thoughtfully complex, ever-evolving designs. Jinx, for example, is not mentally stable and obviously has a destructive side, but we get glimpses of her internal struggles and always understand where she is coming from. Similarly, Silco is a complex character who can't be reduced to an underworld boss because of his genuine, however unhealthy, paternal love for Jinx. Jayce starts off as a scientist only thinking of his research, then he goes through a physical and mental wringer after the world is seduced by the power of hextech. And those are just three of *Arcane*'s iconic characters.



ABOVE AND RIGHT

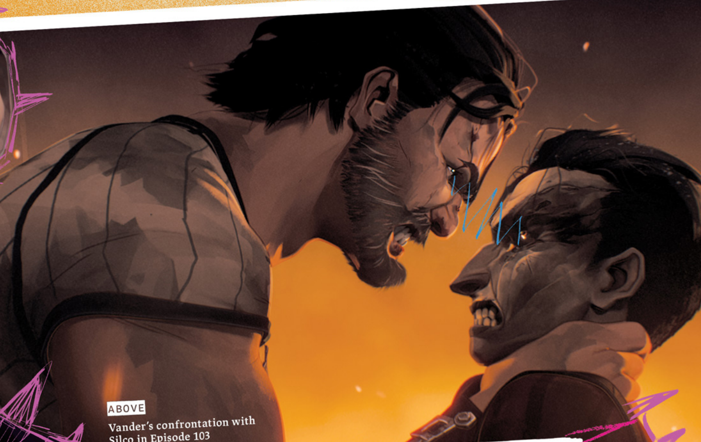
Silco comforts a grieving Powder in Episode 103; early concept for young Silco





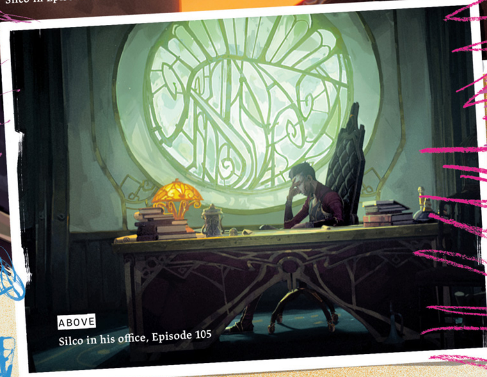
ABOVE

Still of Silco and Jinx from Episode 104



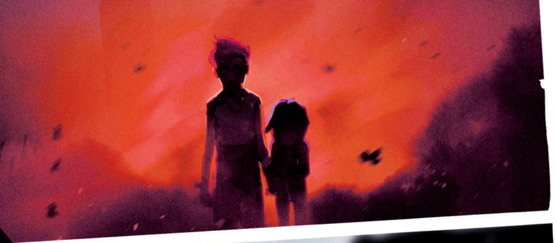
ABOVE

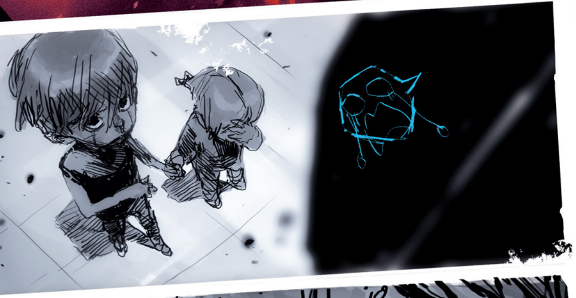
Vander's confrontation with Silco in Episode 103

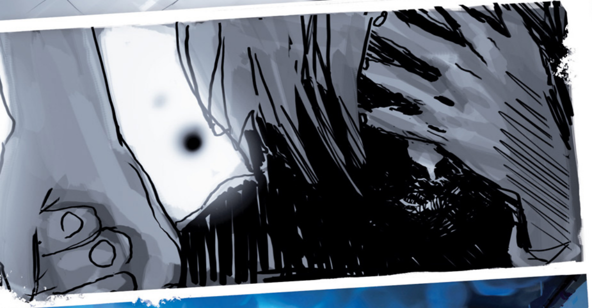


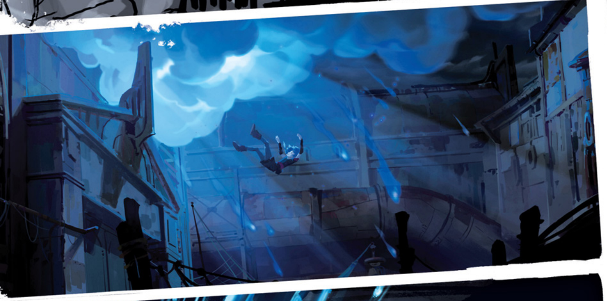
ABOVE

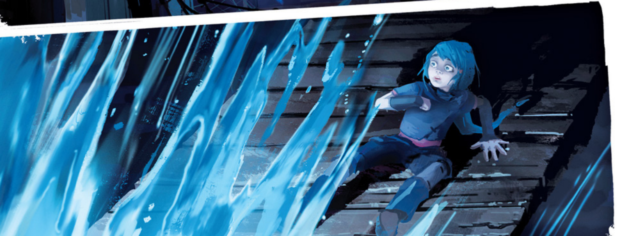
Silco in his office, Episode 105









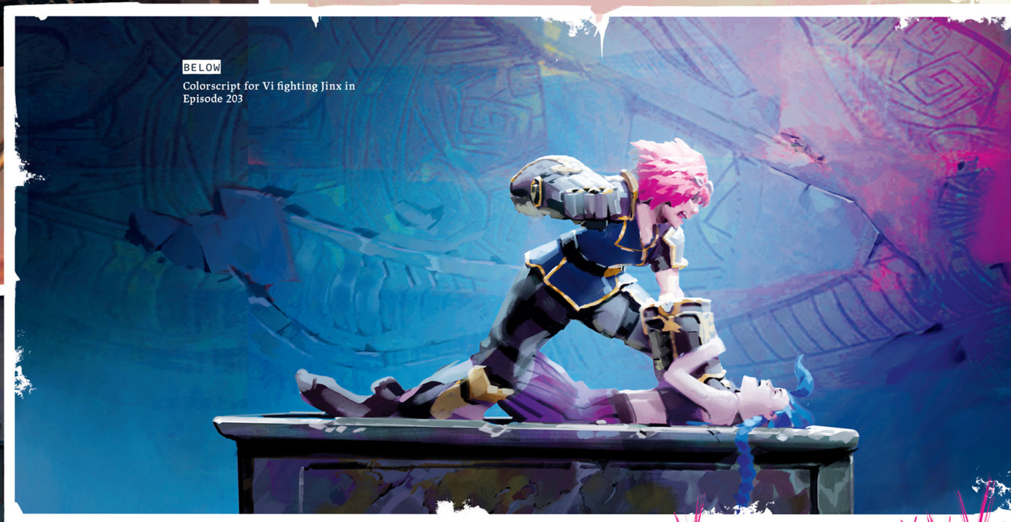


LEFT, FROM TOP

Colorscript from Episode 101; storyboard of Young Vi and Powder; storyboard of Powder; Powder is blasted off after detonating her Hex gem–powered monkey bomb in Episode 103; colorscript of Powder from Episode 103

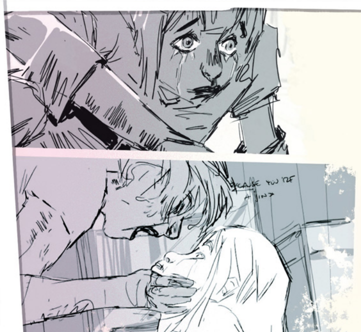
The initial building block of *Arcane* was two popular *League of Legends* champions who were simultaneously connected—well, that was suggested, at least—and antagonistic. When Christian Linke and Alex Yee began working on the show, the series's human anchor felt immediately obvious, and everything else followed. "Jinx and Vi were what we knew right out of the gate," Yee said. "I think the first thing we told ourselves when we started working on the story was 'Okay, we know we want them, and if we're doing them, it's going to be Piltover and Zaun.'"

Screenwriter Amanda Overton also points out the conceptual links between the idea of dualities. "It was a conscious thing from the writers' perspective," she said. "I think a lot of the things I brought in terms of the TV structure were like, 'the spine of our show is the two girls, and we're going to crush them from above and crush them from below.' We always need to think about what those pressures are from the topside and what those pressures are from the bottom side. That's always where the tension and drama from our show is coming in. And then every other gorgeous, artistic, wonderful, nuanced parallel that you find visually was from Fortiche."



BELOW

Colorscript for Vi fighting Jinx in Episode 203

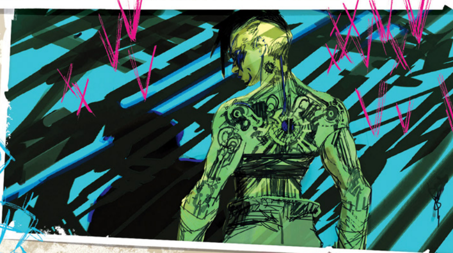


LEFT, FROM TOP

Young Vi and Powder in Episode 101; Vi uses Vander's iron gauntlet in Episode 103; storyboard for Vi yelling at Powder in Episode 103

RIGHT

Storyboard exploration for Cage-fighter Vi for Episode 205



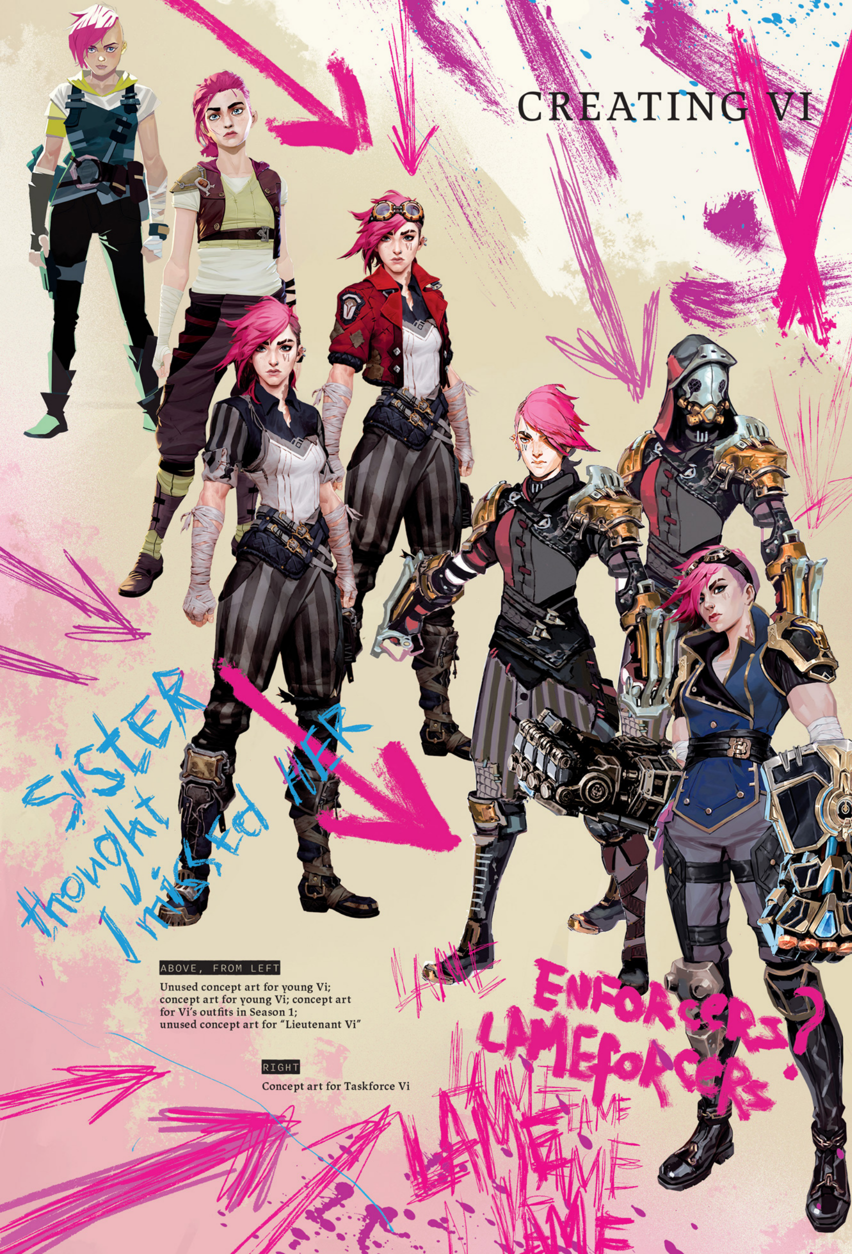
CREATING VI

In *League of Legends*, Vi is known as "The Piltover Enforcer." Over the course of *Arcane*, she becomes the champion we know and love from the game . . . eventually. "People always wondered why Vi became a cop," said Paul Bellezza, director of creative game production at Riot. "Because if she came from the underground, why would she ever do that?"

Vi goes through a whirlwind of adventures and trials over the course of the two seasons, but she remains true to the way she is when we first meet her: a passionate protector of her sister, her friends, her mentor, her city, and her lover. That steadfastness is a testament to her inner strength and her rectitude, even if both get severely tested. She is confident, bold, and rough around the edges. In many respects, Vi is one of the coolest "good guys" ever created.

In an early draft of Season 1, the showrunners shared a startling revelation that it was not Powder who ended up with Silco, but Vi. "I know, right?" Alex Yee said, laughing, after dropping that tantalizing tidbit of developmental lore. "Try to reverse-engineer that in your head and figure out how that makes sense," he continued. "We had worked well through that story concept before we were like, 'We need to go back. We need to start redoing things and repositioning.' There was one scene we actually did do animatics for in which we had Vi on this raid with Silco's gang, where she was a lieutenant. From where we're sitting now, I can't imagine what it would have been like going through the entire story that way."

Evoking a character in quick brushstrokes, before viewers get to know them better, is key to any film or series, whether it's animated or live action. Animation supervisor Martial André contrasted Caitlyn and Vi to underscore the latter's overall approach in terms of body language: "Vi is looser, more casual," he said. "There's no holding back: She'll talk to you or to the president in the same way. There's no filter. This translates to a posture that's a little more crumpled, her head is tucked in, she's watching from underneath her brow or from behind a lock of hair, always on the lookout."

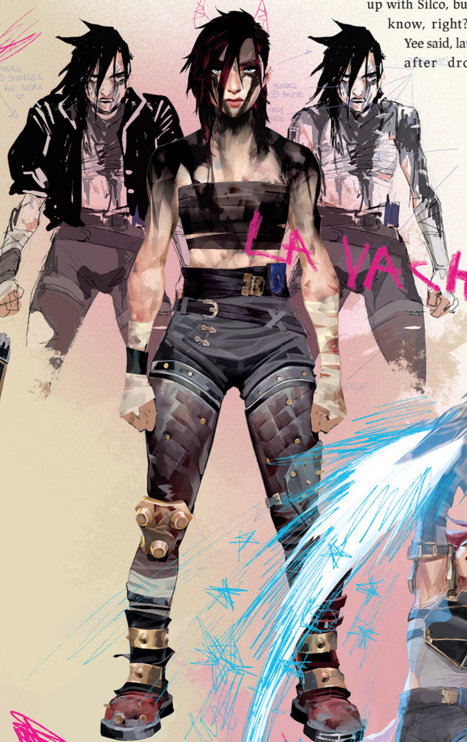


ABOVE, FROM LEFT

Unused concept art for young Vi; concept art for young Vi; concept art for Vi's outfits in Season 1; unused concept art for "Lieutenant Vi"

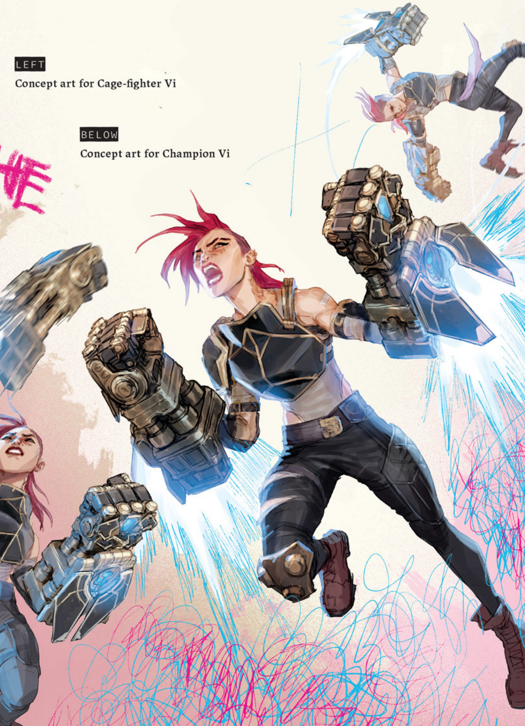
RIGHT

Concept art for Taskforce Vi



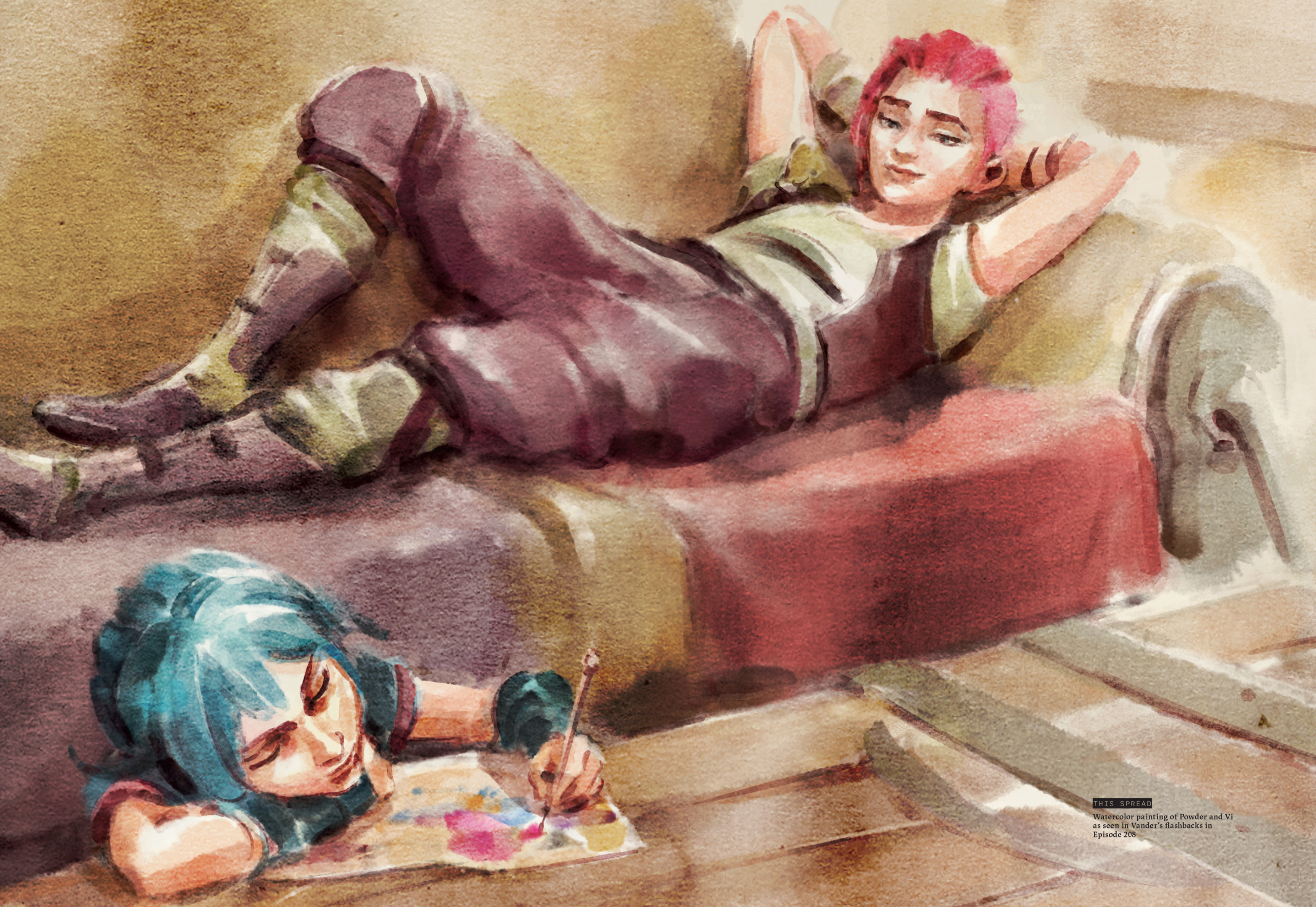
LEFT

Concept art for Cage-fighter Vi



BELOW

Concept art for Champion Vi



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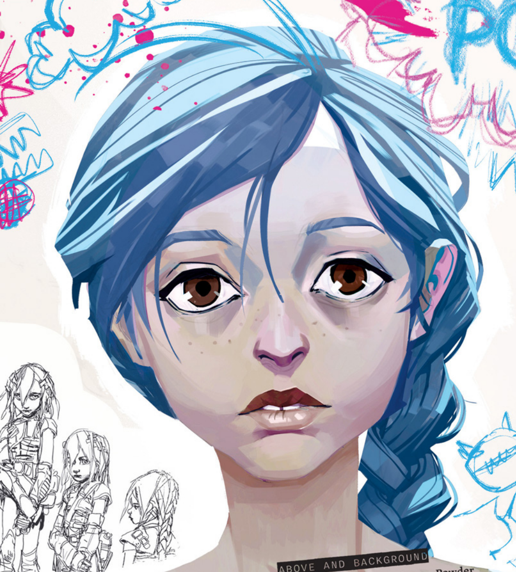
Watercolor painting of Powder and Vi as seen in Vander's flashbacks in Episode 208

POWDER

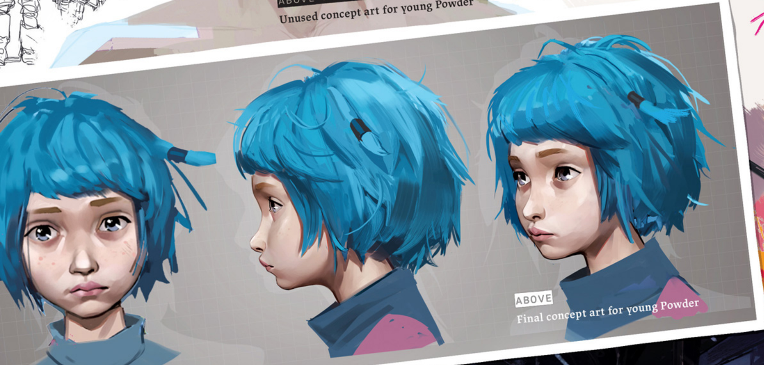
CREATING JINX AND POWDER

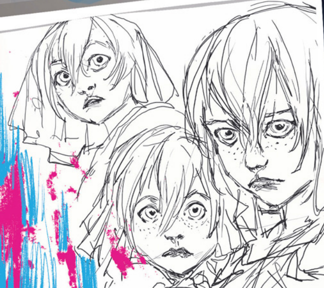

ABOVE AND BACKGROUND
Unused concept art for young Powder

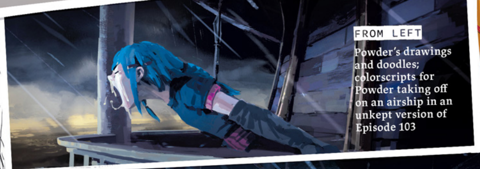
BECAUSE SHE IS ONE OF THE MOST POPULAR and most iconic *League of Legends* champions, it made sense for Jinx to be a key character in *Arcane*. This meant that a lot was riding on the way she would be portrayed. She had to be brought to life in the exact right manner.

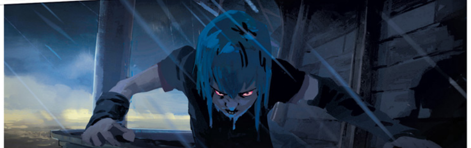
Or maybe we should say they had to be brought to life. Indeed, in telling Jinx's backstory, *Arcane* reveals that she was once known as Powder, a rambunctious little girl who idolized and always wanted to impress her older sister, Vi. Jinx's development went through twists and turns that might surprise her fans. In the original version of Episode 103, for example, Powder took off on an airship with Jules and Verne (remember the French writer from the section on influences?), a pair we first saw in the pilot. "Then she came back in 104 after being with the pirates in Bilgewater, and that's why she has striped pants and looks like a pirate," character and props design supervisor Matthieu Gouget de Landres explained. "So that look is a leftover from the original version of the script, since we'd started designing the character based on that. The final version is completely different since she was raised by Silco. Bottom line, this particular design was inspired by a script that ended up not being shot, which goes to show how characters sometimes don't evolve in a straight line. At the end of the old Episode 103, Powder was on the airship and the last shot was the airship taking off with the camera following it. Powder became Jinx in a scene where she screamed for, like, thirty seconds. Looking at the storyboard, you couldn't wait to see the finished version. Bart [Maunoury] said, 'Guys, if you do a shot like this, it's going to take two years to put together!' They used a bit of that idea when Jinx gets angry in her room," he added, referring to the scene when Powder has a breakdown after Vi, Claggor, and Mylo leave her behind when they go to rescue Vander in that episode's final version.

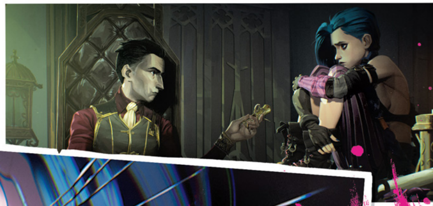
What did make it into the show was a fun, late style change. "In Episode 208, she cuts her hair after getting out of jail," Gouget de Landres said. "Due to technical issues, the directors wanted to get rid of the braids. They're really nice but in the final battle, in Episode 209, she's on a flying skateboard and braids were just one more thing we had to worry about.

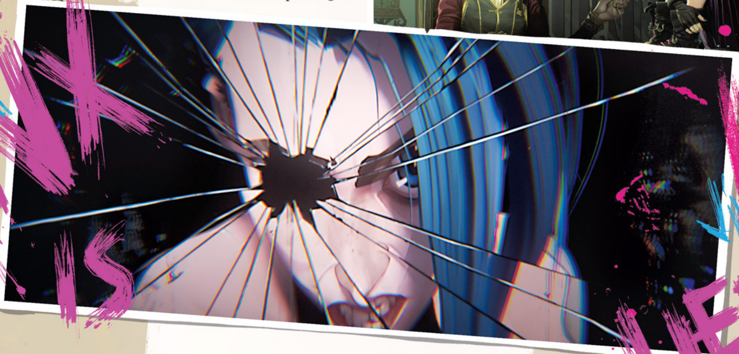

ABOVE
Final concept art for young Powder






FROM LEFT
Powder's drawings and doodles; colorscripts for Powder taking off on an airship in an unkept version of Episode 103





JINX
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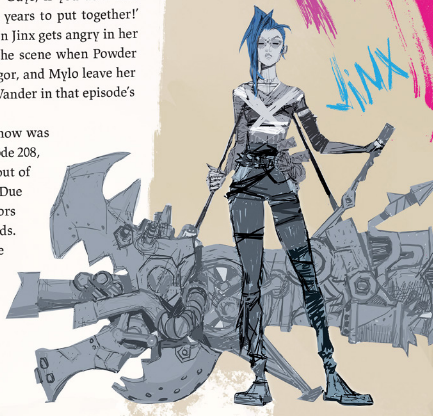
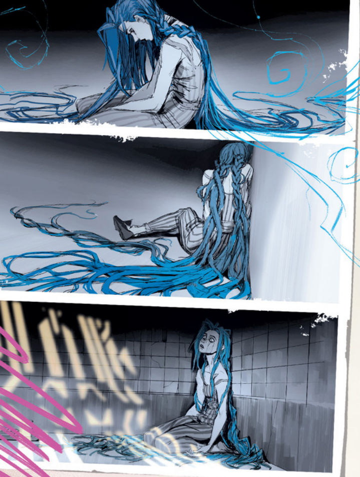


FROM TOP
Silco gives Jinx his shimmer eye-dropper in Episode 104; Jinx has a breakdown in Episode 107; concept art for Champion Jinx

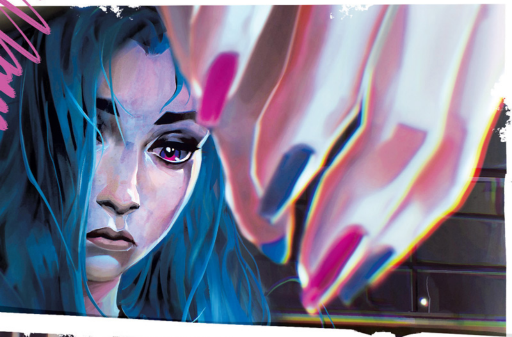


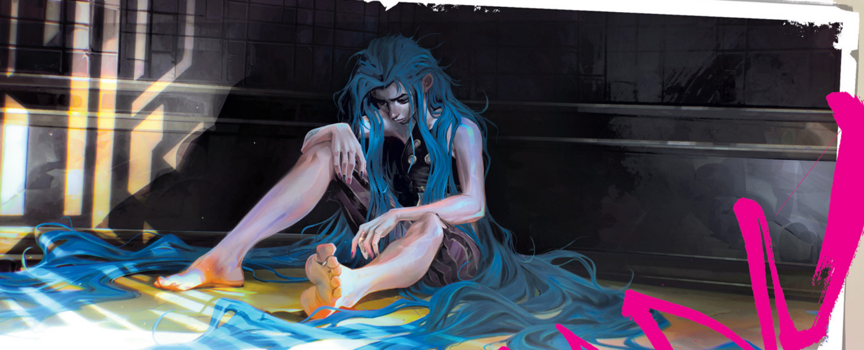
The decision was not made for just practical reasons: She has braids in the game and the directors thought it'd be cool to have Jinx look a little different in the show." It also represents a change in Jinx herself, letting go and freeing herself.

Powder is a key *Arcane* expansion upon Jinx's story in *League of Legends*. The little girl makes us understand that her older self is not just a colorful, larger-than-life trickster. "The character wants to be both Powder and Jinx," Amanda Overton said. "She likes the strong parts of Jinx that make her not afraid, that make her feel worthy. Every time she cares about someone, she kills them—that's how she feels in her mind. If she doesn't care about people, then it doesn't hurt her anymore. But she can't not care about Vi. That's why it's hard for her when Vi only sees her as Powder, because she's not Powder anymore. I thought Alex [Yee] wrote the scene in Episode 106 so well, where she's like, 'I'm not a child anymore, stop speaking to me like a child.' That's sort of the heart of the show: In order for these sisters to truly be sisters, they have to see each other as adults."

ABOVE AND BELOW

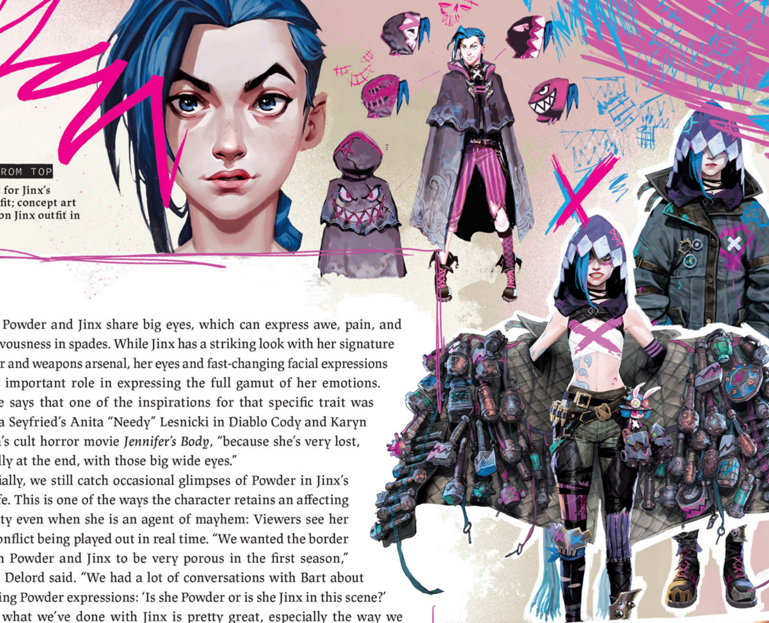
Storyboards and keyshots for Jinx imprisoned in Episode 208





The other big presence in Jinx's life is Silco, who takes Powder in after her big argument with Vi and becomes a kind of adoptive father, mentoring her into becoming Jinx. The challenge she faces is that nobody fully accepts her. "Silco does honestly believe that Jinx is perfect, but he's not willing to see the Powder part of her as well," Overton said. "Conversely, Vi is not willing to see the Jinx part in Season 1. Part of their arc in Season 2 is that Vi has to accept that her sister is both Jinx and Powder."

For the little girl's appearance, Pascal Charrue of Fortiche did not have to look very far for inspiration: "I often used my daughter as a reference," he said, laughing. "She had very pale skin and circles under her eyes when she was young, so I used her as a model. I remember that several people worked on young Powder, and at one point we blended a few faces to create one we liked."



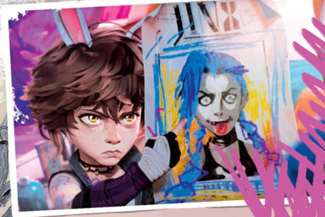
RIGHT, FROM TOP

Concept art for Jinx's cloaked outfit; concept art for Champion Jinx outfit in Season 2

Both Powder and Jinx share big eyes, which can express awe, pain, and mischievousness in spades. While Jinx has a striking look with her signature blue hair and weapons arsenal, her eyes and fast-changing facial expressions play an important role in expressing the full gamut of her emotions. Charrue says that one of the inspirations for that specific trait was Amanda Seyfried's Anita "Needy" Lesnicki in Diablo Cody and Karyn Kusama's cult horror movie *Jennifer's Body*, "because she's very lost, especially at the end, with those big wide eyes."

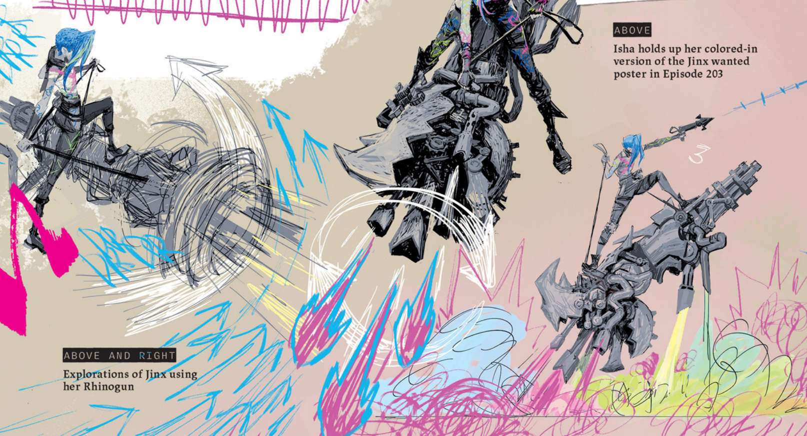
Crucially, we still catch occasional glimpses of Powder in Jinx's adult life. This is one of the ways the character retains an affecting humanity even when she is an agent of mayhem: Viewers see her inner conflict being played out in real time. "We wanted the border between Powder and Jinx to be very porous in the first season," Arnaud Delord said. "We had a lot of conversations with Bart about suggesting Powder expressions: 'Is she Powder or is she Jinx in this scene?' I think what we've done with Jinx is pretty great, especially the way we describe her madness. It's a lot more complex than just 'Oh I'm so kooky.'"

The memory of Powder also makes Jinx's relationship with the little girl Isha, in Season 2, even more poignant. Because even as she appears to be locked inside her madness, Jinx has not entirely lost touch with Powder and remains able to forge connections with others. Isha is one such person, an urchin who looks up to Jinx and sees in her someone strong,



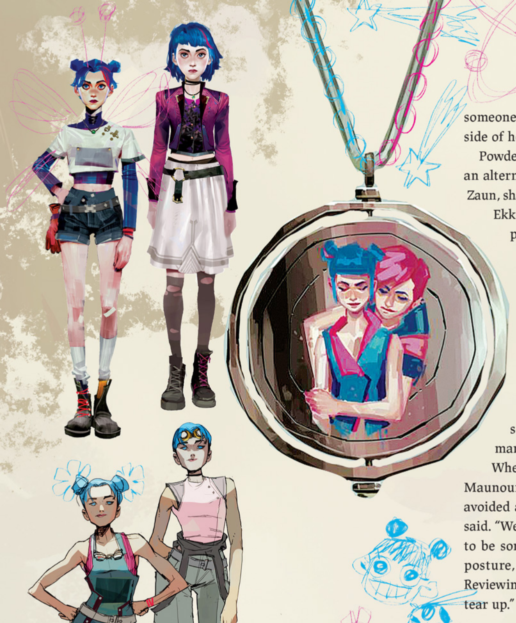
ABOVE

Isha holds up her colored-in version of the Jinx wanted poster in Episode 203



ABOVE AND RIGHT

Explorations of Jinx using her Rhinogun

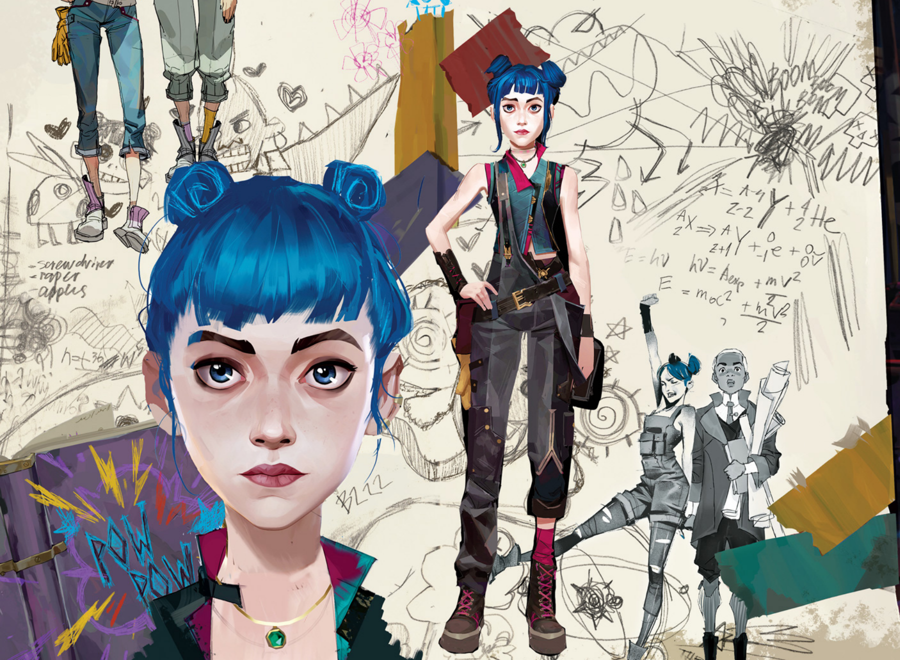


someone to admire. And of course, Isha reminds Jinx of the side of herself that is buried deep somewhere.

Powder is also at the heart of Episode 207, which is set in an alternate timeline in which she grows up in a peaceful Zaun, shares a loving, mutually supportive relationship with Ekko, and uses her inventive mind to more constructive purposes than Jinx does—the show's bible describes Jinx as "unpredictable, manic, innovative," and that last word is essential to understanding her.

At all times, it was important not to portray Jinx as just "the crazy one." "We didn't want it to be *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*," editor Nazim Meslem said. "We had to preserve some fragility in the character, and avoid stereotypical madness where someone is just ranting about. We tried really hard to avoid clichés and remain sensitive to the character's fragility—one in which many of us can see ourselves reflected."

When asked what he is most proud of in *Arcane*, Bart Maunoury singles out the character of Jinx. "I think we avoided a lot of traps when it comes to her portrayal," he said. "We wanted to make her madness credible—there had to be something broken within her. Even in her physical posture, you can see that she remains a broken child. Reviewing shots of her crying in Episode 103, I would almost tear up."



OPPOSITE PAGE
Concept art for alternate-universe Powder; unused version of alternate-universe Powder's necklace; alternate-universe Powder's drawings

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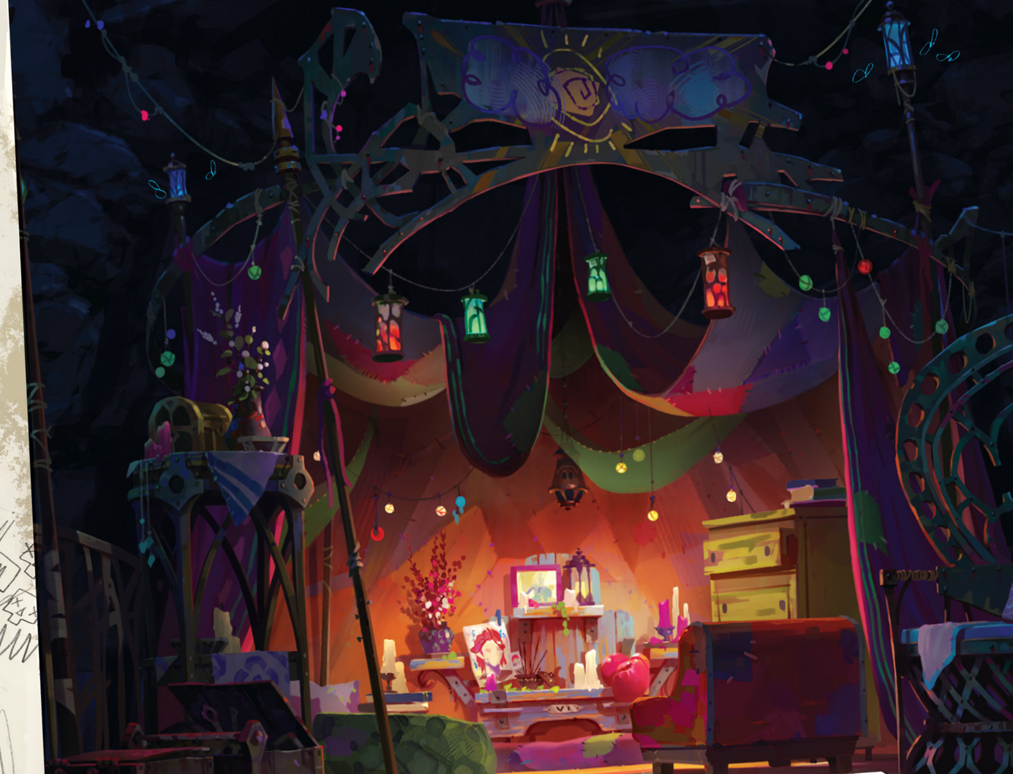
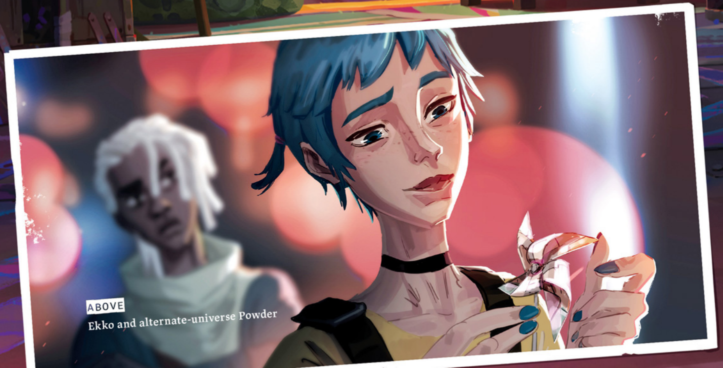
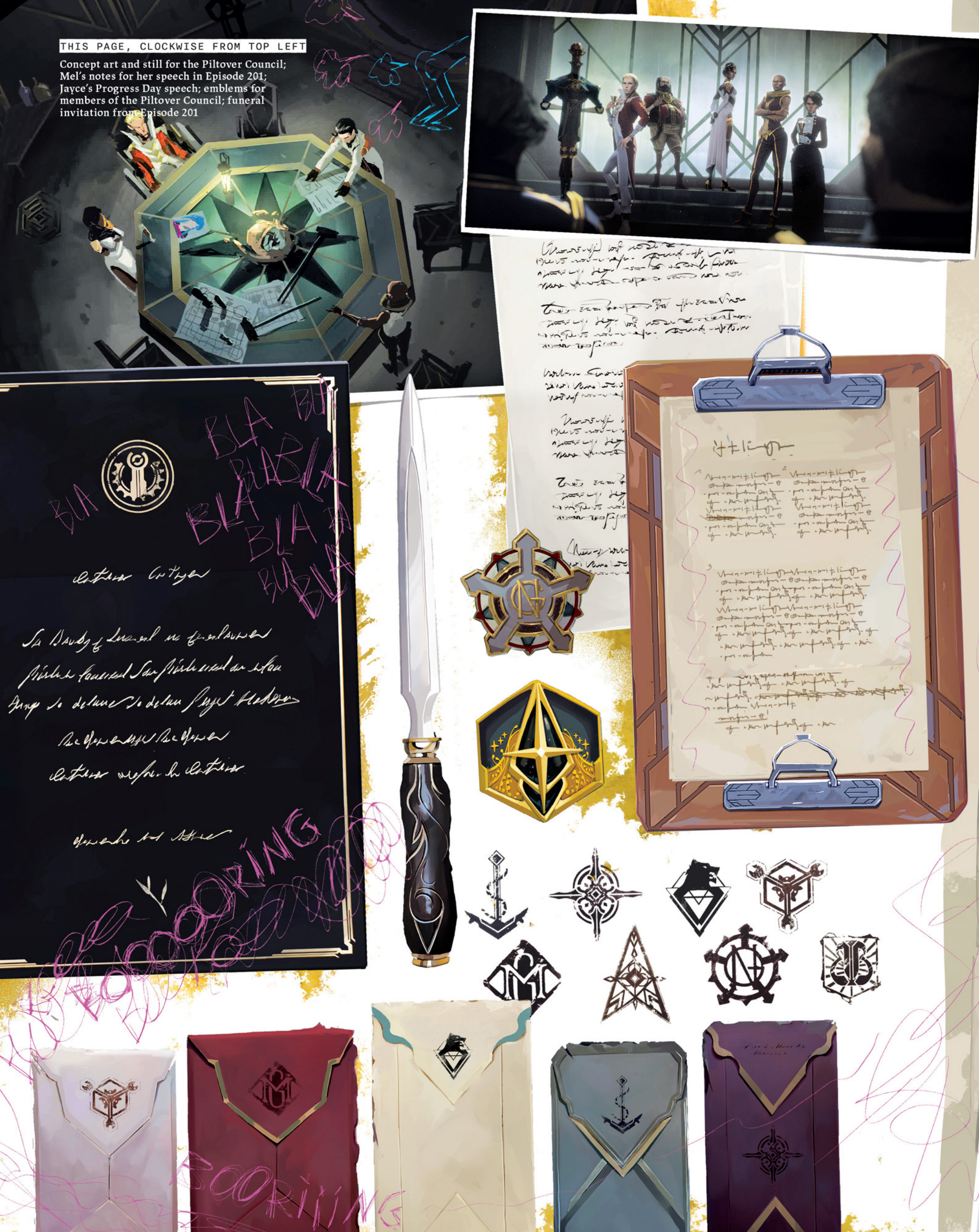
Matte painting of alternate-universe altar for the deceased Vi





ABOVE
Ekko and alternate-universe Powder



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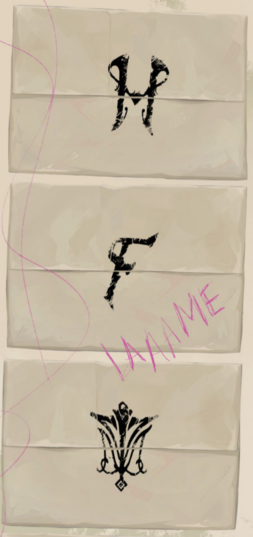
Concept art and still for the Piltover Council; Mel's notes for her speech in Episode 201; Jayce's Progress Day speech; emblems for members of the Piltover Council; funeral invitation from Episode 201

THE COUNCIL & THE CHEM-BARONS

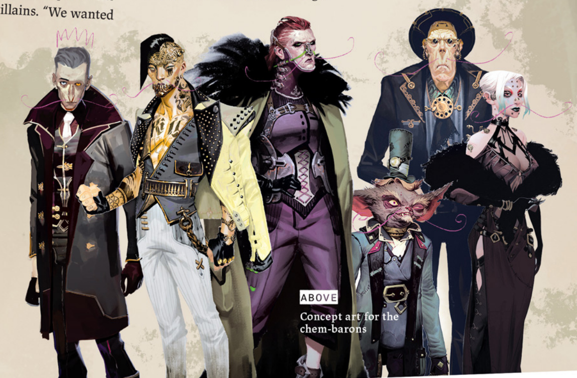
BOTH PILTOVER AND ZAUN FEATURE ELITE GROUPS that more or less run the political show. On the topside, it's the Council; in the underground city, it's a cartel of criminal individuals known as the chem-barons. Fortiche really went to town with these characters, who sport some of the most fanciful designs in the entire show. Amusingly, the two groups are like Bizarro versions of each other, further pushing the concept of dualities. This is most obvious in the characters of the Council member and eminent scientist Heimerdinger and his underworld counterpart, Smeech. Tellingly, Smeech leads the Scrap Hackers, which specialize in body modifications of all kinds. The chem-barons have very distinctive visuals, as if Clive Barker had decided to design Victorian narco-gangsters. According to Arnaud-Loris Baudry, Fortiche drew inspiration from various Batman villains. "We wanted them to be a bit cartoonish—not grotesque," he said. "We designed all of them to have goons that are connected to their fantasy."

Director Bart Maunoury is an avowed fan of the chem-barons, saying that "they are characters I'd love to use again if we ever do other projects in this universe. We don't do comedy much in *Arcane*, and they brought in a dose of fun and entertainment that was just great. When you see Smeech, with his mechanical arms that unfold every which way, you just want to film him with a short lens that will create crazy angles. Those are the scenes where we allowed ourselves to look toward anime, because it suited the character's design."



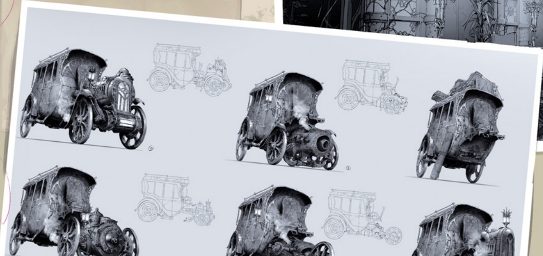
CENTER LEFT

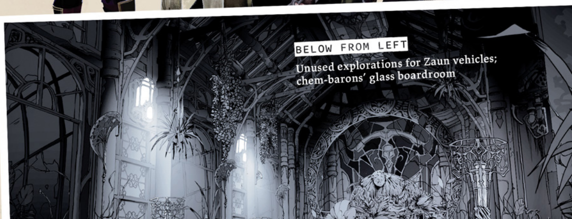
Emblems for members of the chem-barons



ABOVE

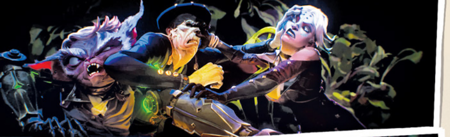
Concept art for the chem-barons

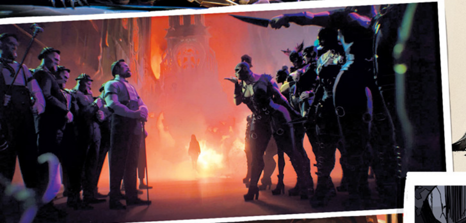


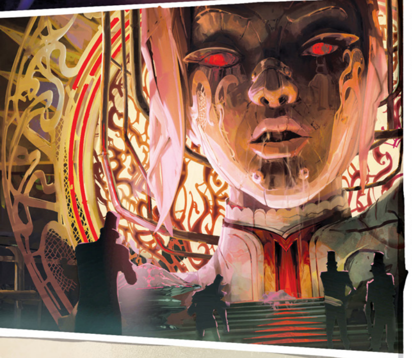


BELOW FROM LEFT

Unused explorations for Zaun vehicles; chem-barons' glass boardroom





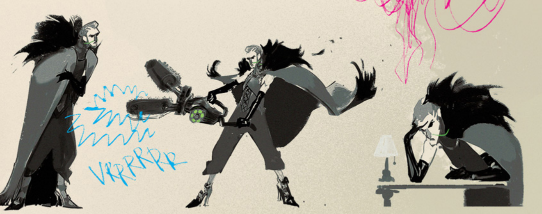


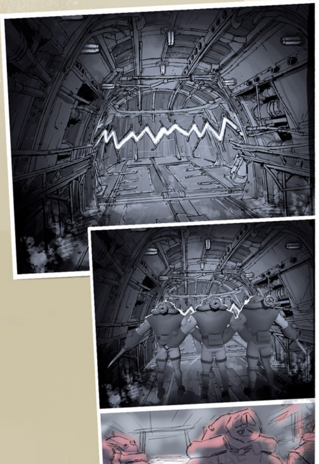
ABOVE, FROM TOP

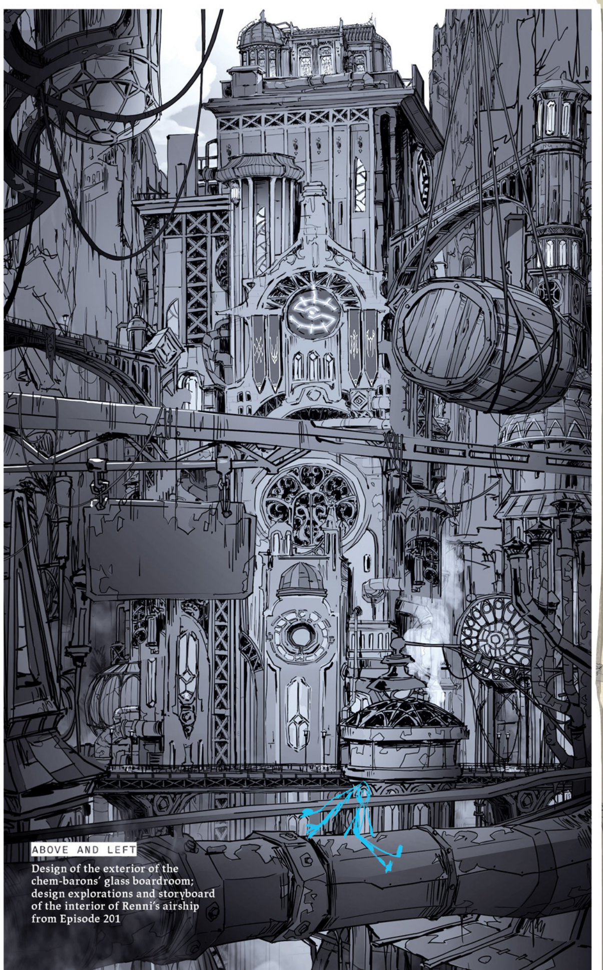
Stills of the chem-barons war; matte painting of Margot's lair, from Episode 202

BELOW

Concept art for Chem-baron Renni







ABOVE AND LEFT

Design of the exterior of the chem-barons' glass boardroom; design explorations and storyboard of the interior of Renni's airship from Episode 201

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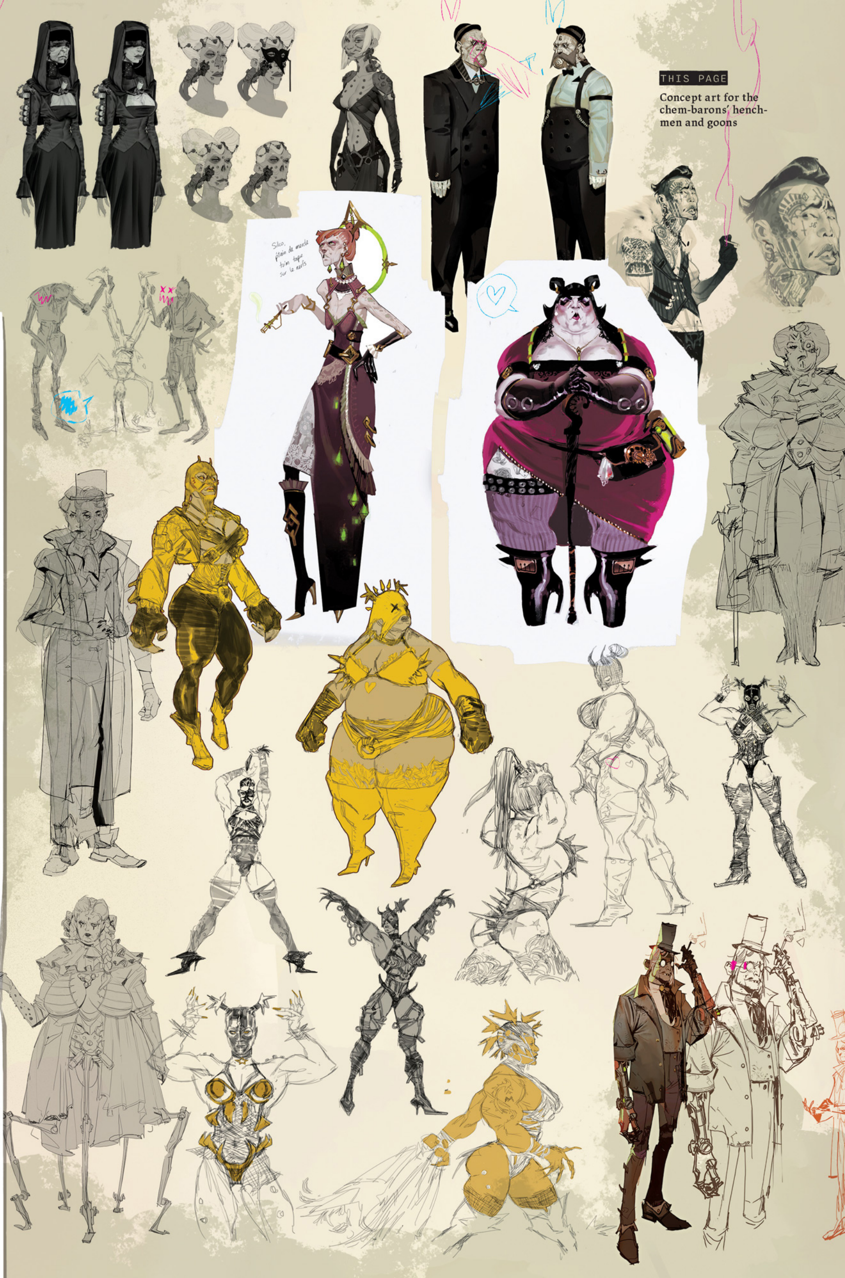
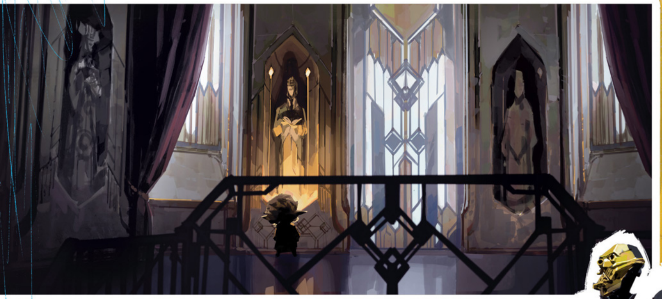
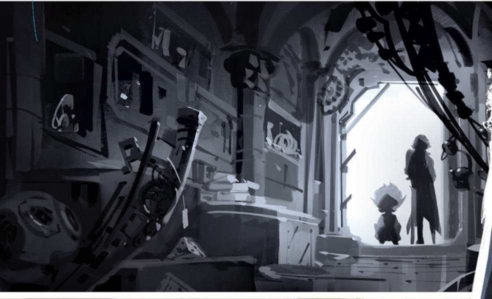
Concept art for the chem-barons' henchmen and goons

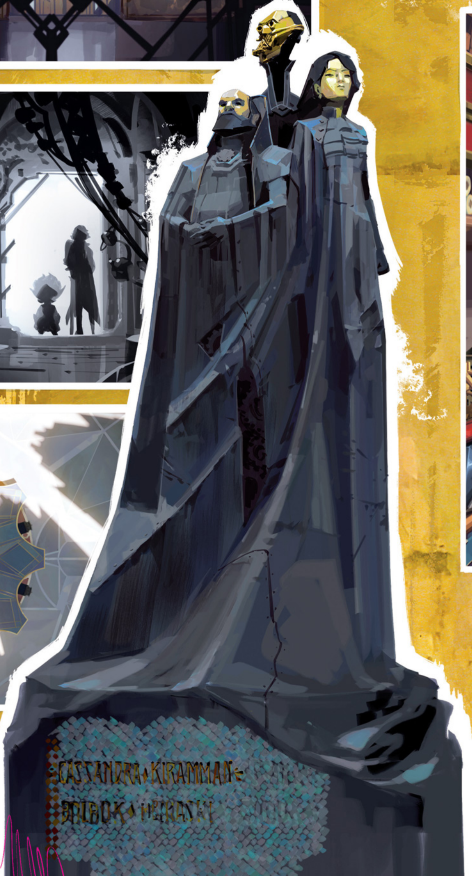

Silco,
p'tain de merde
tu'm tape
sur le nerfs

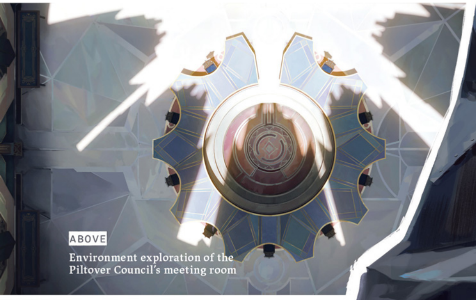
BELOW AND CENTER LEFT
Environment explorations of Heimerdinger's lab

CENTER RIGHT
Statue commemorating the Council members killed in Jinx's attack of Episode 109





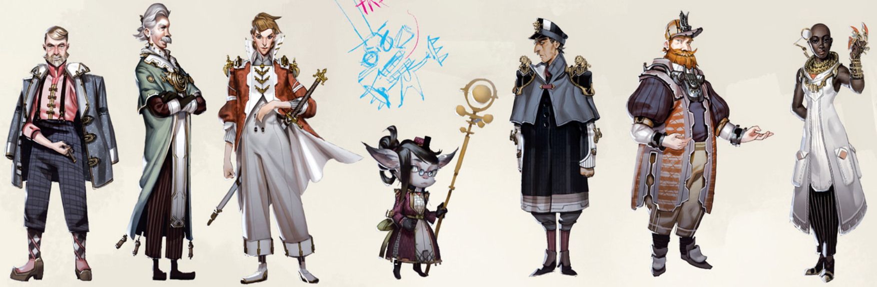


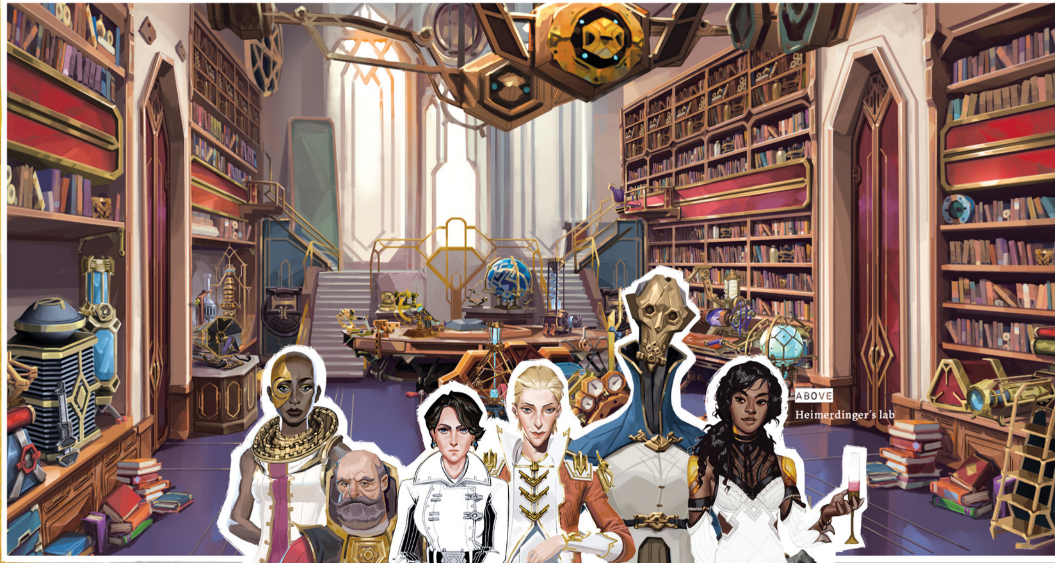


ABOVE
Environment exploration of the Piltover Council's meeting room

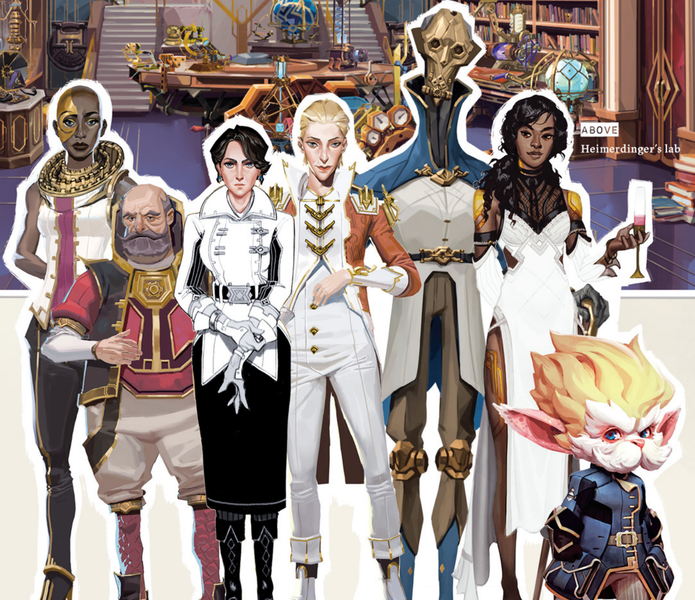
BELOW
Unused concept art for a different lineup of the Council, with Tobias instead of Cassandra Kiramman and different outfits

Hi Let's
rule
the city





ABOVE
Heimerdinger's lab



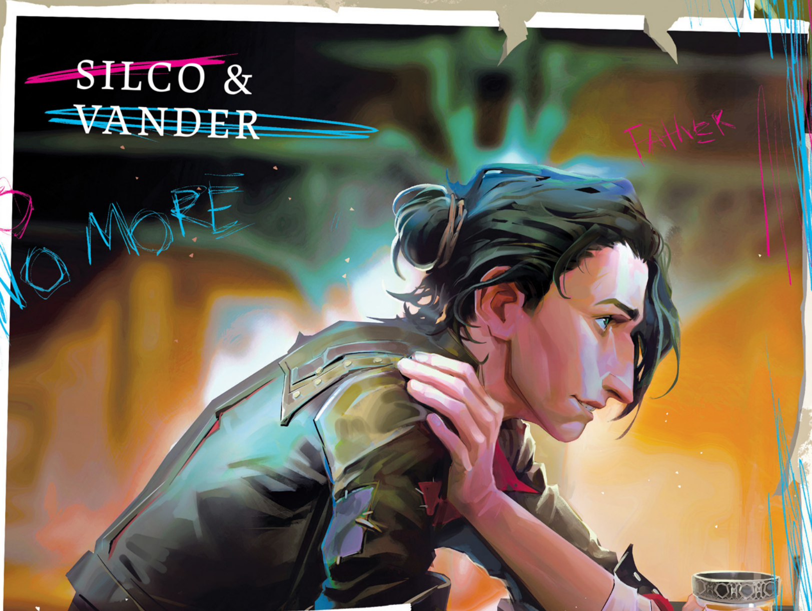
LEFT
Concept art for the Council membership

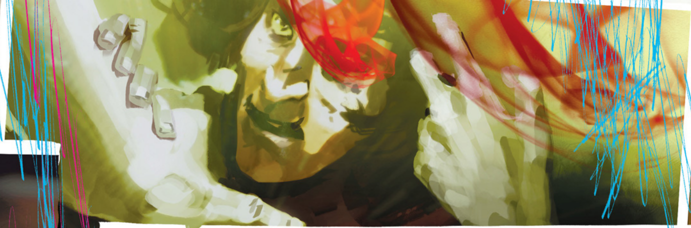
EVERYBODY loves ME

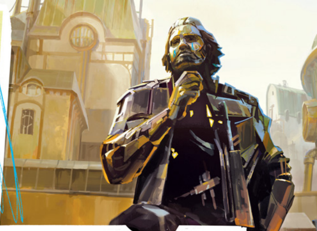
BELOW

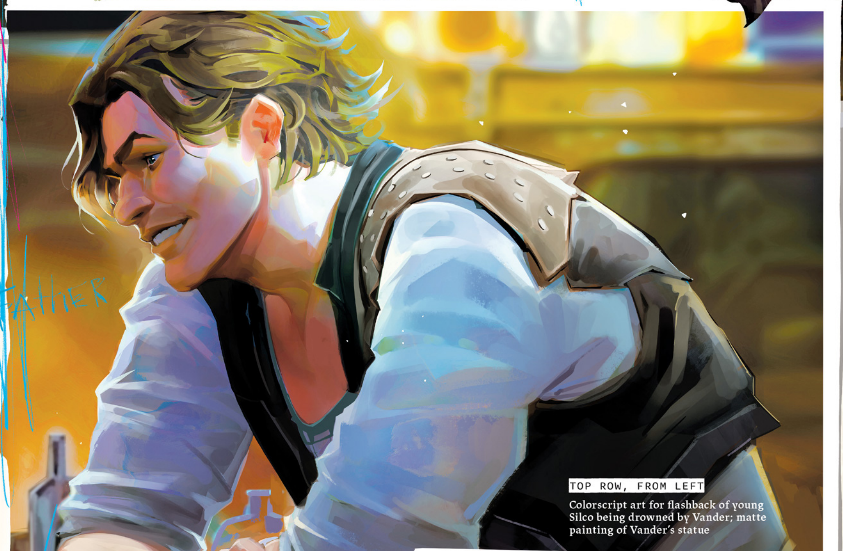
Concept art for young Silco and Vander

SILCO & VANDER



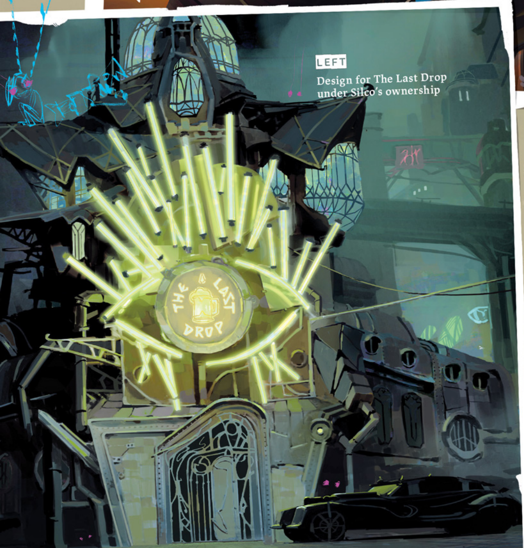






TOP ROW, FROM LEFT

Colorscript art for flashback of young Silco being drowned by Vander; matte painting of Vander's statue

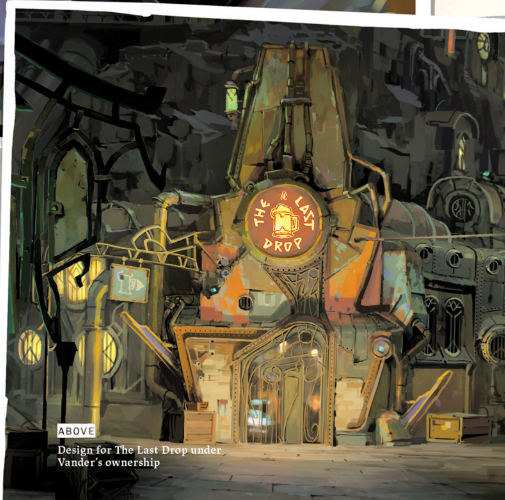


LEFT

Design for The Last Drop under Silco's ownership

THE CHARISMATIC SILCO AND VANDER ARE dominant leaders of their respective circles in Zaun: Silco is an underworld kingpin; Vander, the owner and barkeep of The Last Drop, is the benevolent father figure of a micro-society of outsiders and urchins and to his adoptive daughters, Vi and Powder. The two men have a brotherly connection and they, too, are Bizarro reflections of each other. "The way we crafted Silco, we always called him this dirty little thing, because that's how the world saw him," Amanda Overton said. "He spent his whole life desperately trying to prove that he wasn't that. The only person who never saw him that way was Vander. That's why they loved each other like brothers. They respected each other and then tried to build this world together. But when push came to shove, Silco was willing to do anything to not be treated like a dirty little thing anymore, and Vander was not."

Silco and Vander also embody the way nothing is clear-cut in *Arcane*. Silco is nominally a villain but he is relatable and has a noble cause. His main objective is for Zaun to have pride in itself and hold its own against Piltover, by any means necessary. Vander starts off as a moderate go-between of sorts between Zaun and Piltover, but undergoes a drastic change from Season 1 to Season 2, when he resurfaces as Warwick, who inspires the kind of terror Silco would have created in Season 1.

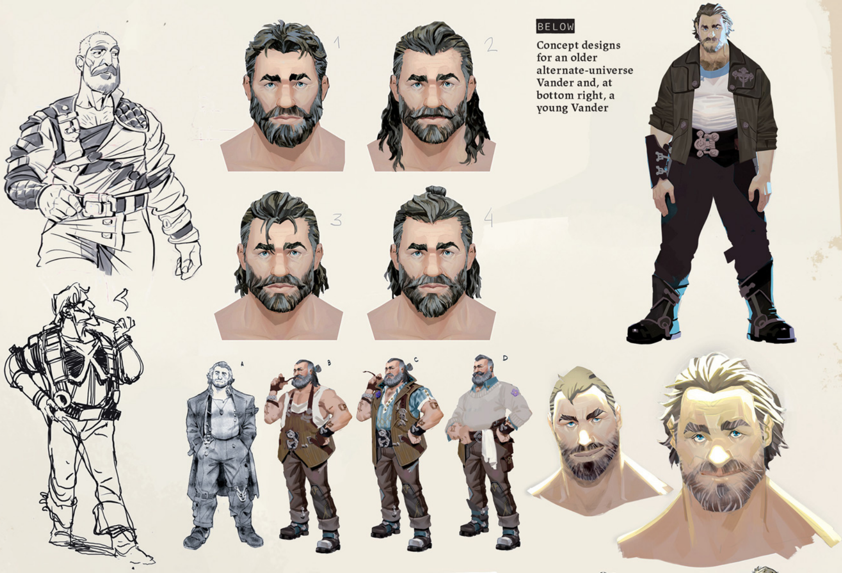


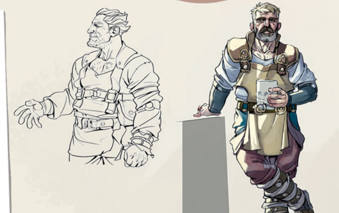
ABOVE

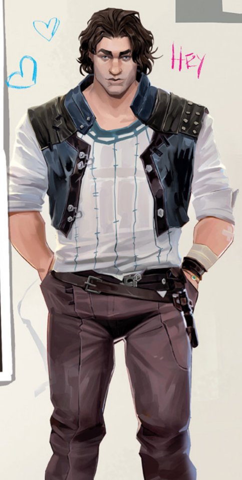
Design for The Last Drop under Vander's ownership

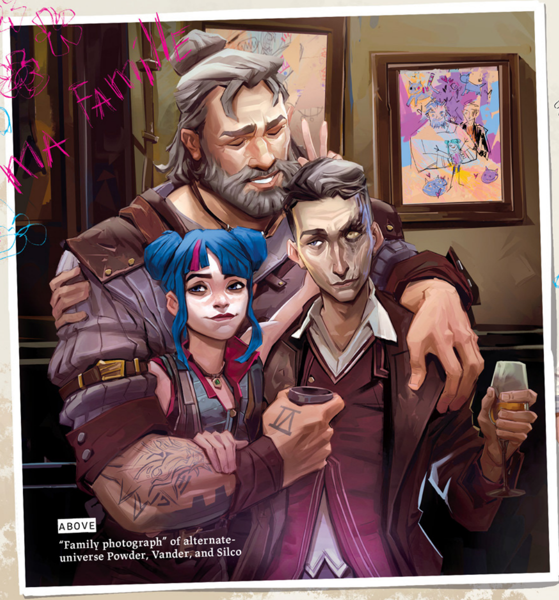
BELOW

Concept designs for an older alternate-universe Vander and, at bottom right, a young Vander







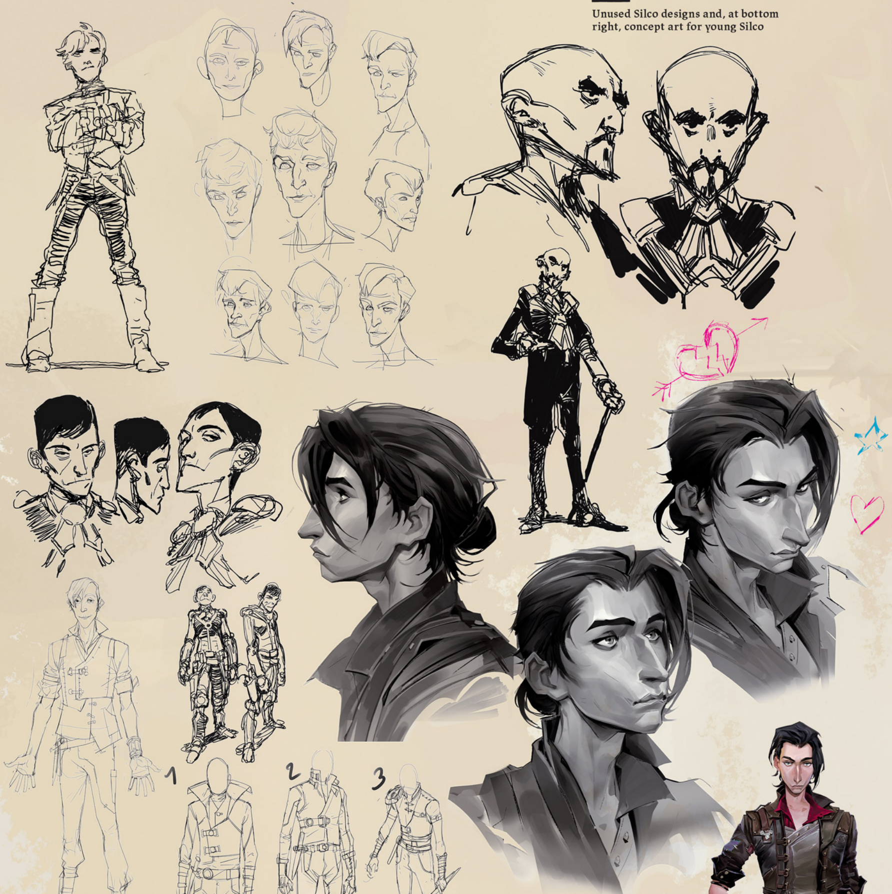


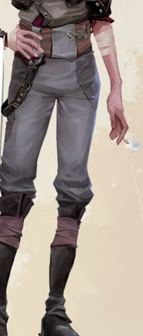
ABOVE

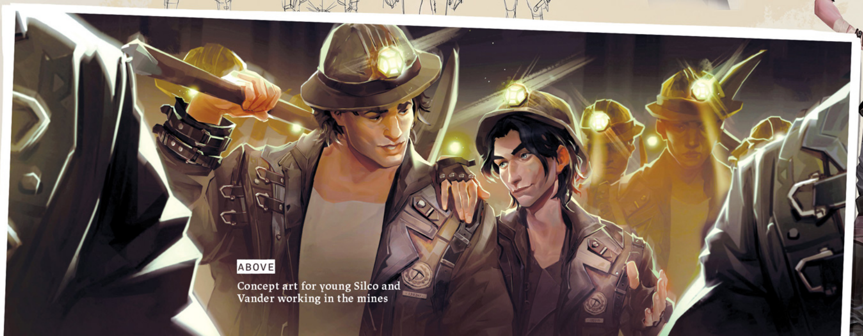
"Family photograph" of alternate-universe Powder, Vander, and Silco

BELOW

Unused Silco designs and, at bottom right, concept art for young Silco





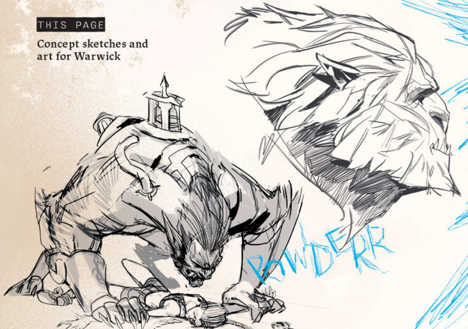


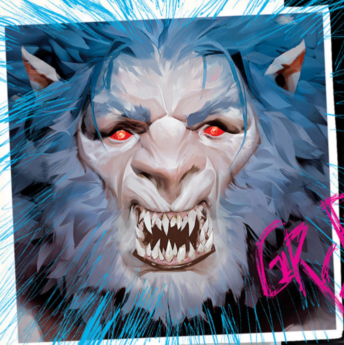
ABOVE

Concept art for young Silco and Vander working in the mines

THIS PAGE

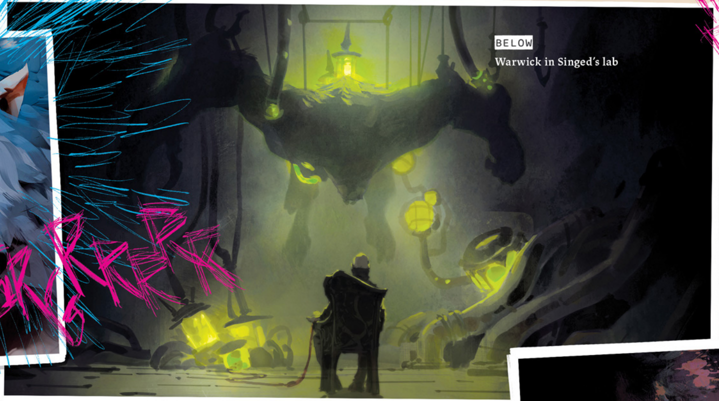
Concept sketches and art for Warwick

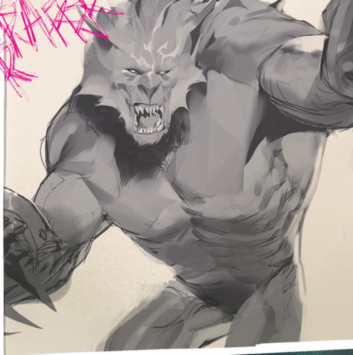


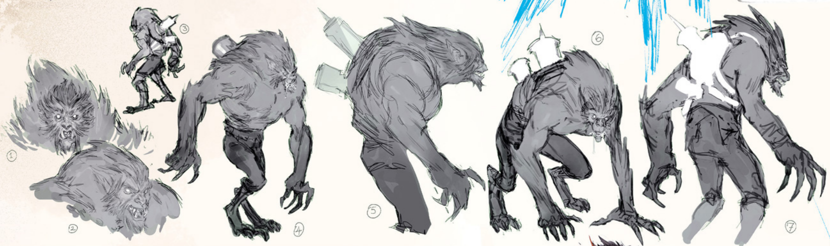


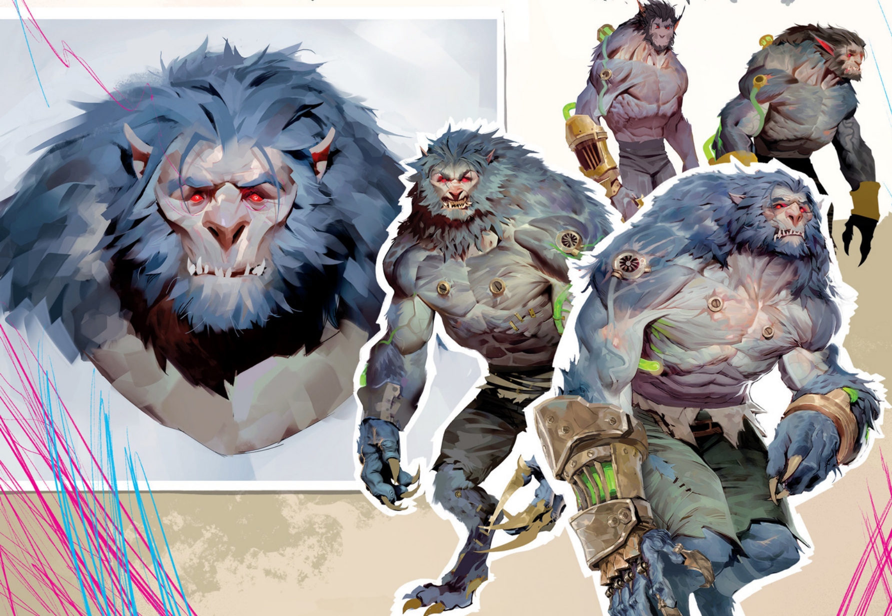
BELOW

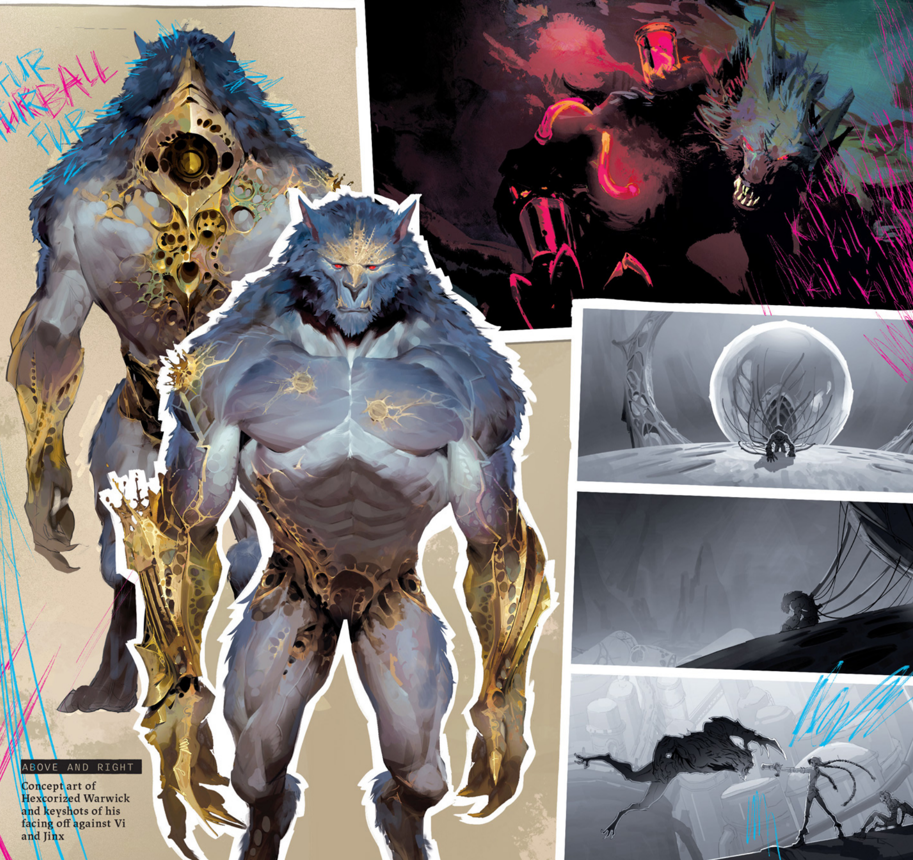
Warwick in Singed's lab







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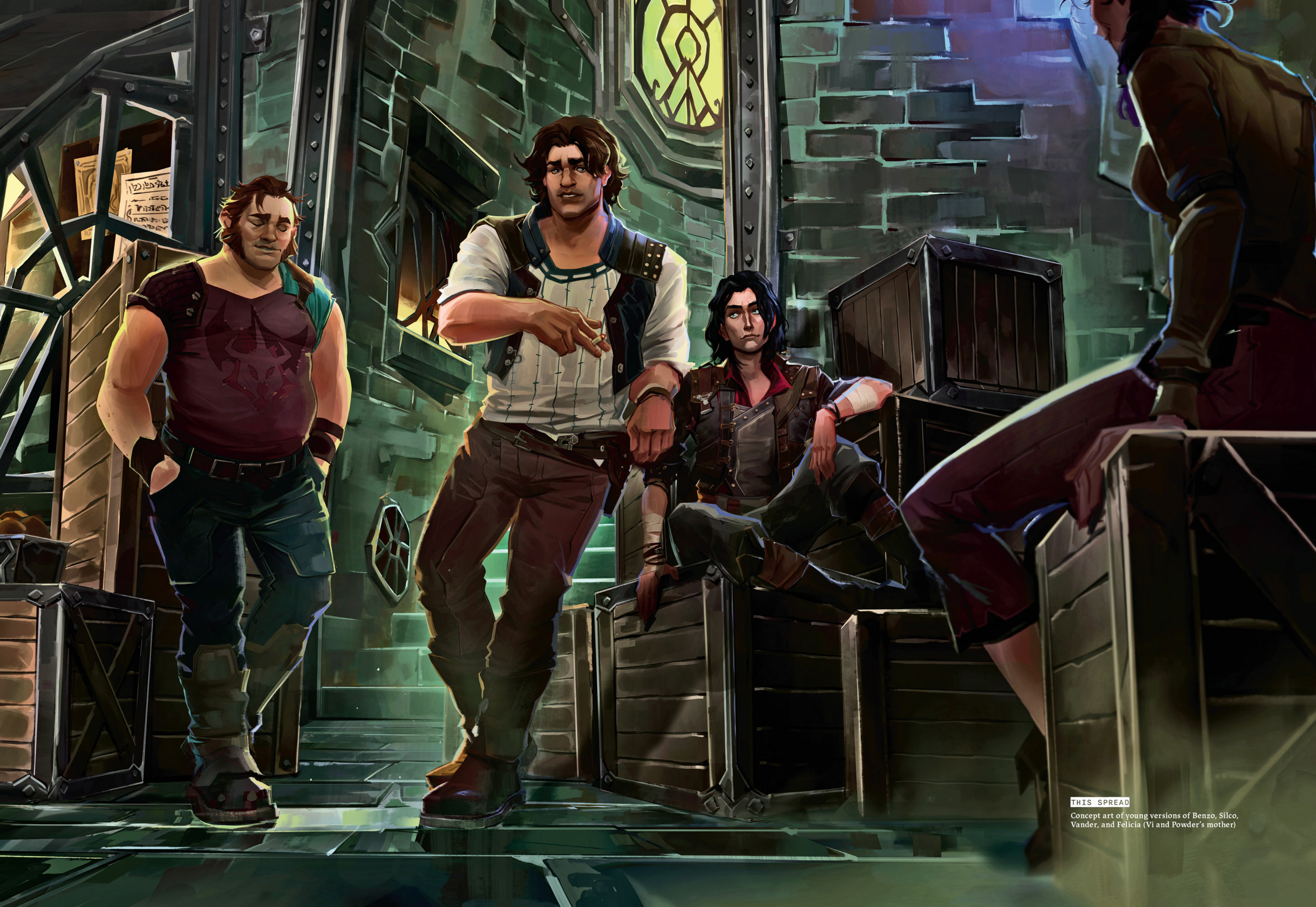
ABOVE AND RIGHT

Concept art of Hexcorized Warwick and keyshots of his facing off against Vi and Jinx



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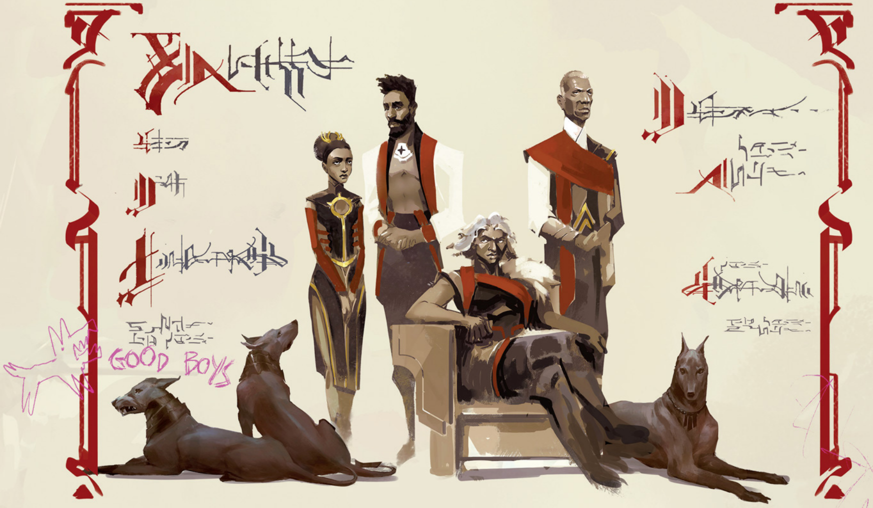
Concept art of young versions of Benzo, Silco, Vander, and Felicia (Vi and Powder's mother)



MEL & AMBESSA

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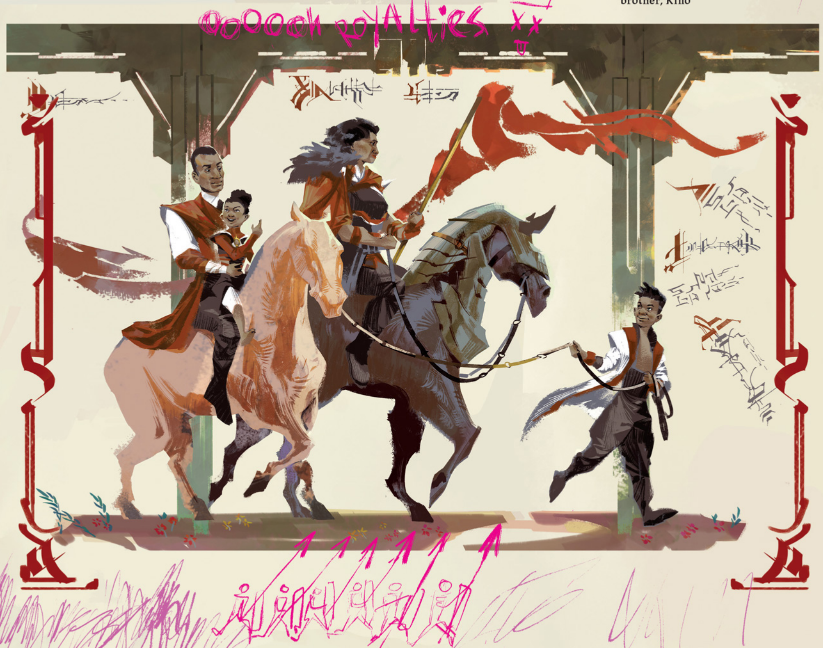
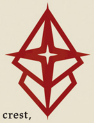
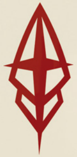
Concept art for Medarda family, including young Mel and her brother, Kino





RIGHT

Medarda family crest, Ambessa's version



LEFT

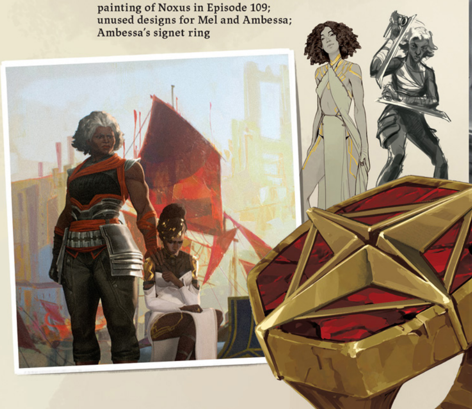
Medarda family crest, Mel's version

AS *LEAGUE OF LEGENDS* PLAYERS WELL know, Piltover and Zaun are only a small part of the much wider world of Runeterra, which includes such factions as Ionia, Shurima and, more importantly when it comes to *Arcane*, Noxus. The Medarda family hails from the venerable military empire, with mother Ambessa and daughter Mel playing a big role in the series, especially in Season 2. Not only do they contribute to the plot, but their presence helps suggest that Piltover and Zaun don't exist in a vacuum. "Knowing that Mel was an exile from Noxus, knowing we would bring in her mother, who was having her own troubles within Noxus, we were able to always allude to that world being there," said *Arcane* writer Amanda Overton. "It feels like you're part of a bigger, more real world, and we bring in those elements very slowly and organically until we get to the end, where it's this huge war between two cities that also has global repercussions."

Not only do Mel and Ambessa help insert the show into a larger framework, but they also embody the two-way interconnectedness of the game and the series, with *League of Legends* champions being turned into *Arcane* characters, and characters designed for the series being incorporated into the game. To make sure the latter worked, Fortiche closely collaborated with Riot at the conception stage to ensure a smooth integration into the gameplay.

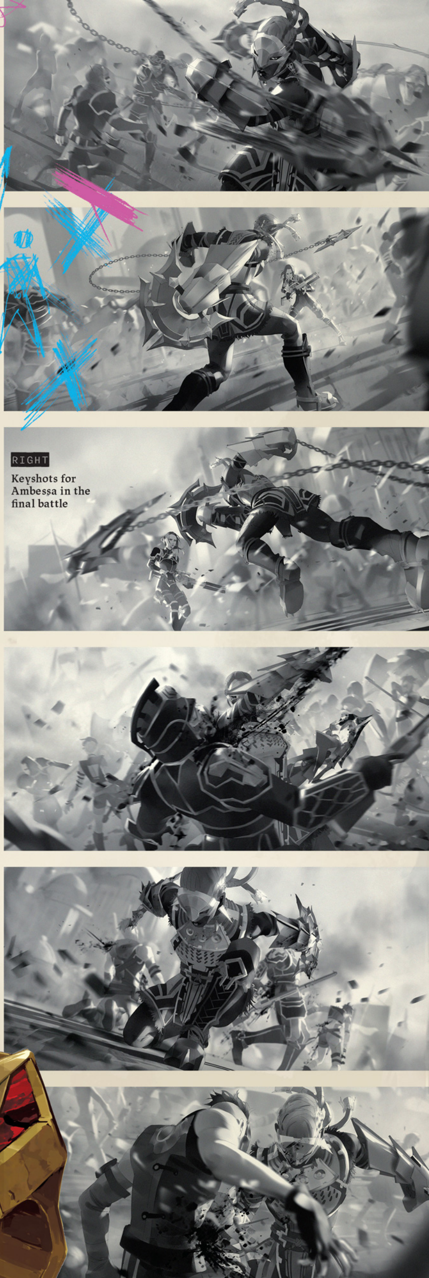
BELOW

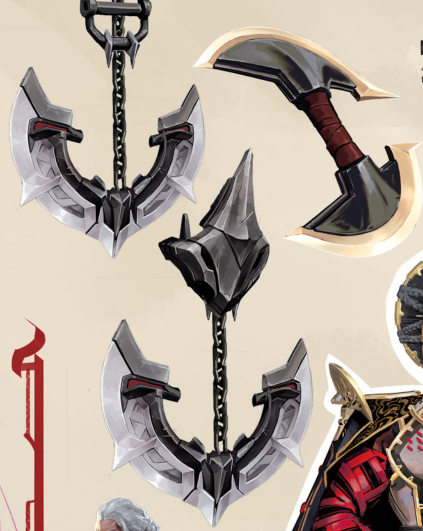
Mel and Ambessa in front of Mel's painting of Noxus in Episode 109; unused designs for Mel and Ambessa; Ambessa's signet ring



RIGHT

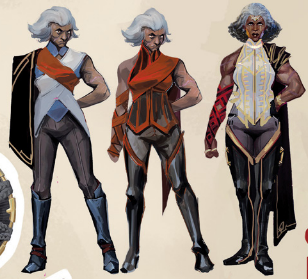
Keyshots for Ambessa in the final battle

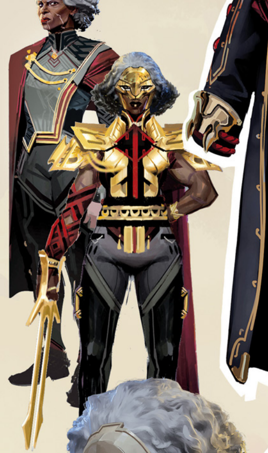


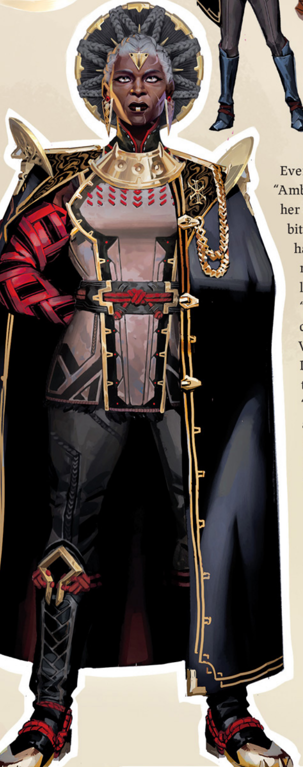


BELOW LEFT

Ambessa's main weapon, the twin drakehounds







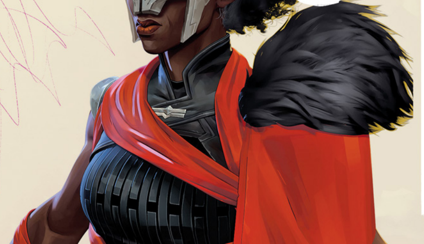
Every detail was scrutinized. "Ambessa's blade gauntlets give her a little bit of chain and a little bit of distance so that she could have more range, which was more exciting than just small little blades," Larry Ray said. "Now they're bigger and she can swing, and she's powerful. Very similar to a character like Draven," he added, referring to another Noxian champion. "It shows that she comes from a culture or a society where they assimilate different regions and so they learn different technologies."

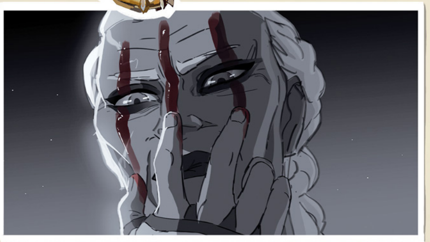
ABOVE AND LEFT

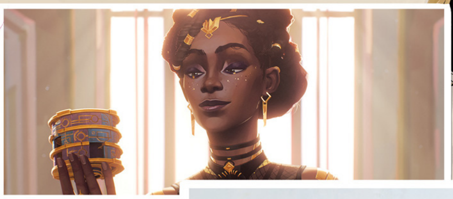
Concept art for Ambessa's regal outfits and her final regal outfit design

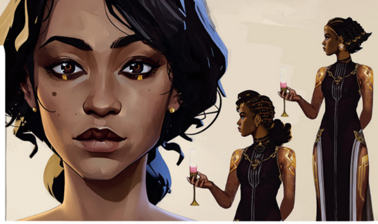
BOTTOM LEFT

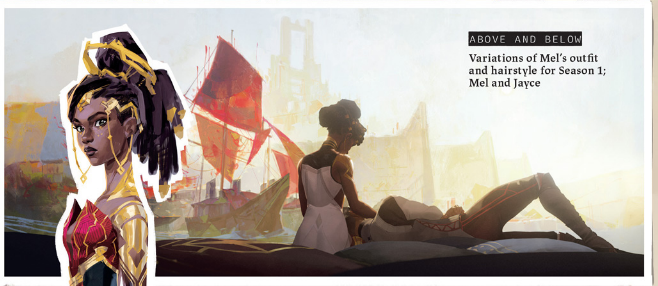
Ambessa with her mask





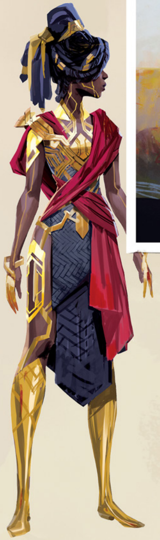


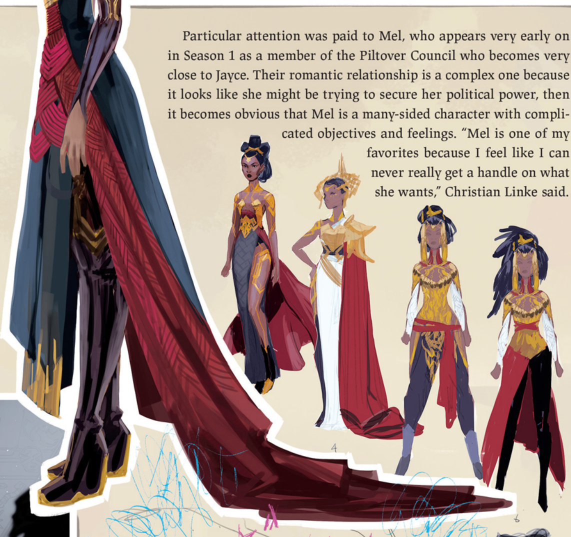




ABOVE AND BELOW

Variations of Mel's outfit and hairstyle for Season 1; Mel and Jayce

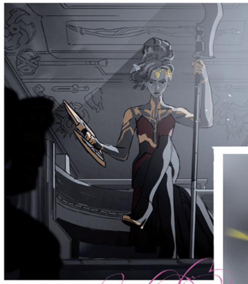


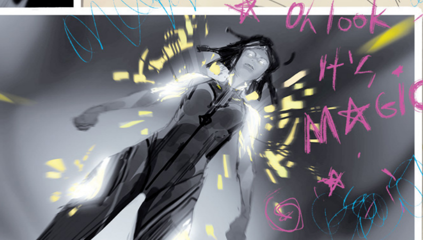


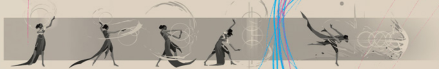
Particular attention was paid to Mel, who appears very early on in Season 1 as a member of the Piltover Council who becomes very close to Jayce. Their romantic relationship is a complex one because it looks like she might be trying to secure her political power, then it becomes obvious that Mel is a many-sided character with complicated objectives and feelings. "Mel is one of my favorites because I feel like I can never really get a handle on what she wants," Christian Linke said.

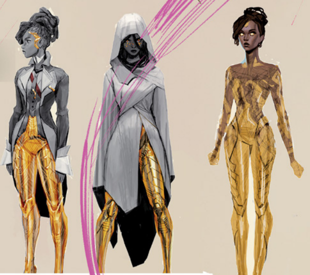
ABOVE AND BELOW

Concept designs for Mel in formal regalia; Keyshots of Mel activating her powers

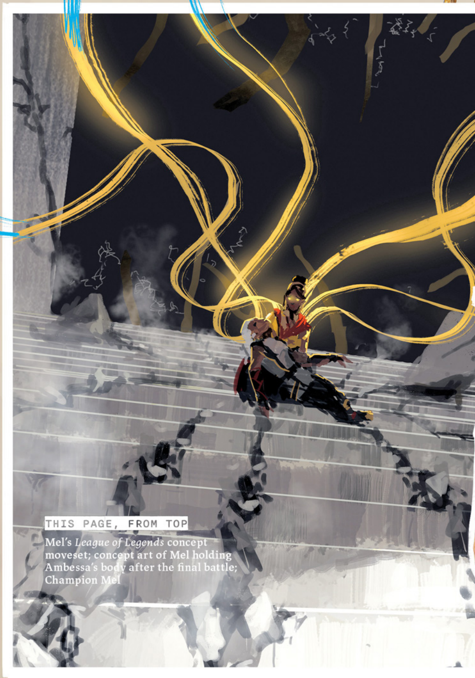


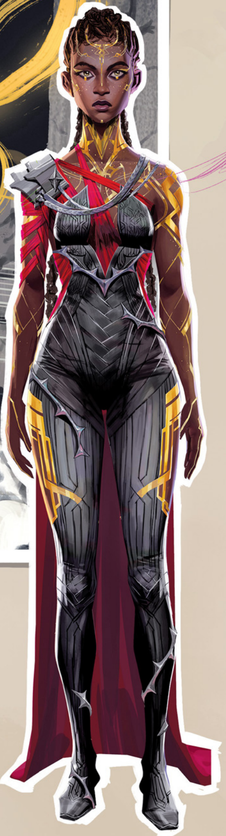






Mel fully comes into her own in Season 2 when she must figure out her relationship with her mother in addition to discovering her own untapped abilities. Ray explained that "with Mel, we explored what it would look like if she transitioned into a caster, a magic user: How can you keep her elegance, but show that she's ascending to an untapped power?"





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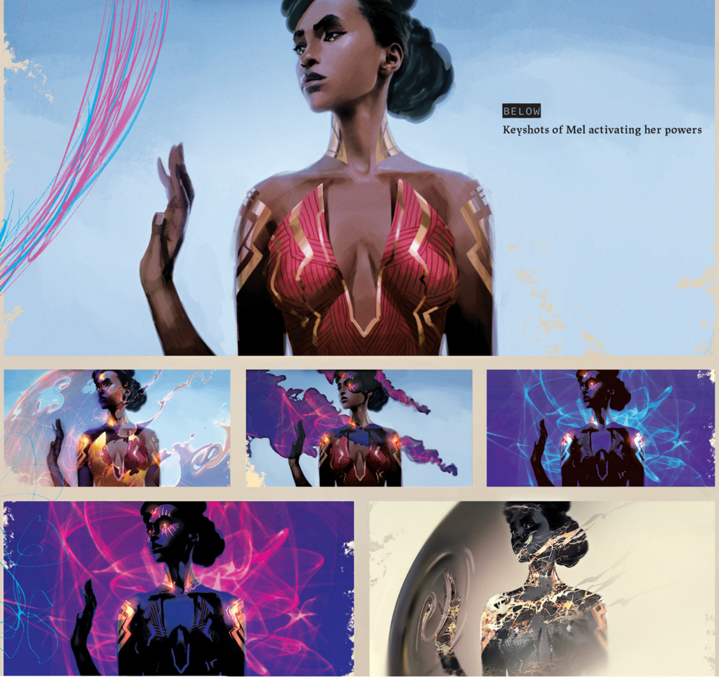
Mel's *League of Legends* concept moveset; concept art of Mel holding Ambessa's body after the final battle; Champion Mel

Mel turned out to be among *Arcane*'s most complex creations, one who keeps revealing different layers and ends up in a very different place than the one where she started. "We had the benefit of knowing we would have a Season 2 pretty early into Season 1," Amanda Overton said. "We knew a lot about where these characters were going to end up when we started writing, so we got to take the time to make the audience think Mel might be a manipulative, one-note villain, and then in Episode 108 we're like, 'Just when you thought you had her figured out, you have to look deeper and you see another layer.'"



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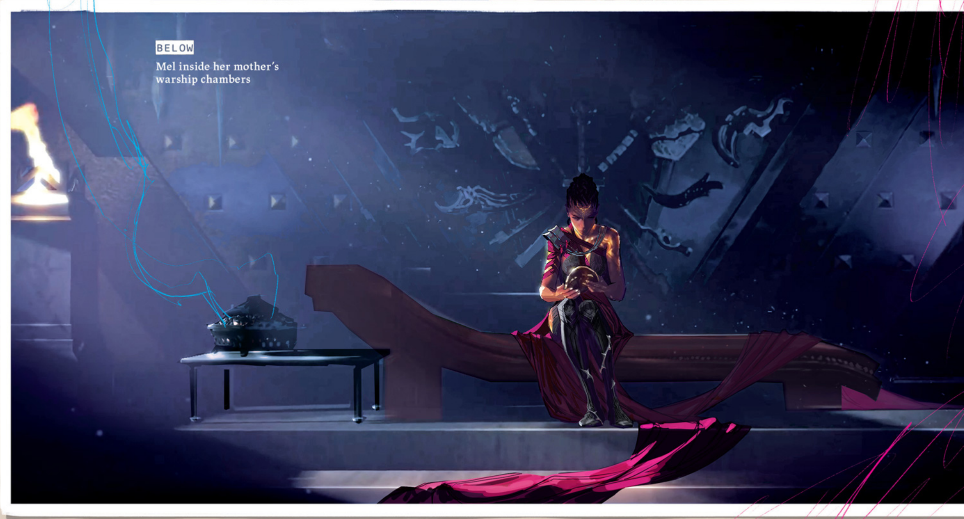
Keyshots of Mel activating her powers



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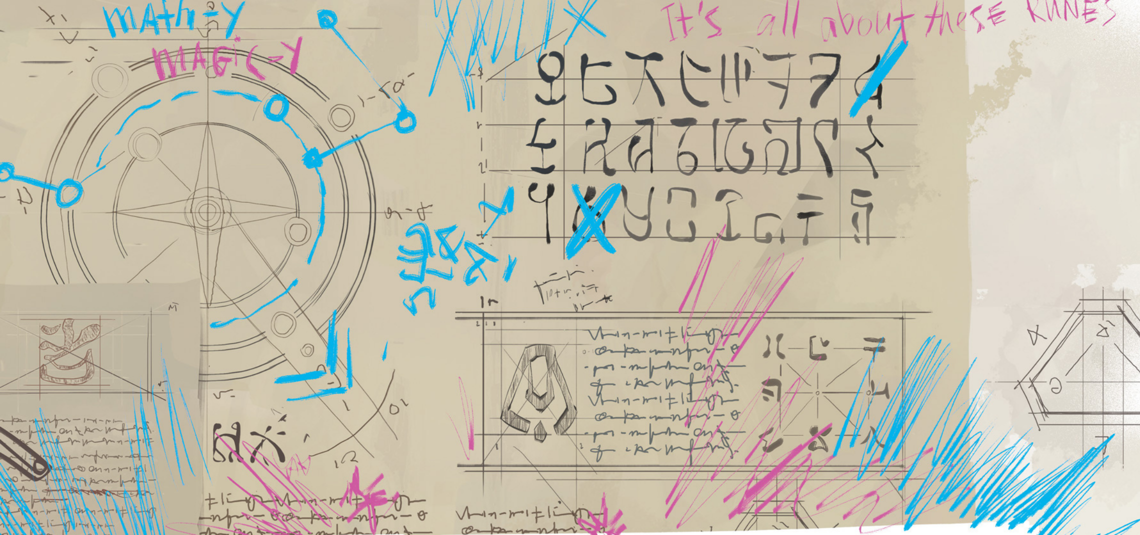
Mel inside her mother's warship chambers


math-y
MAGIC-y
It's all about these RUNES

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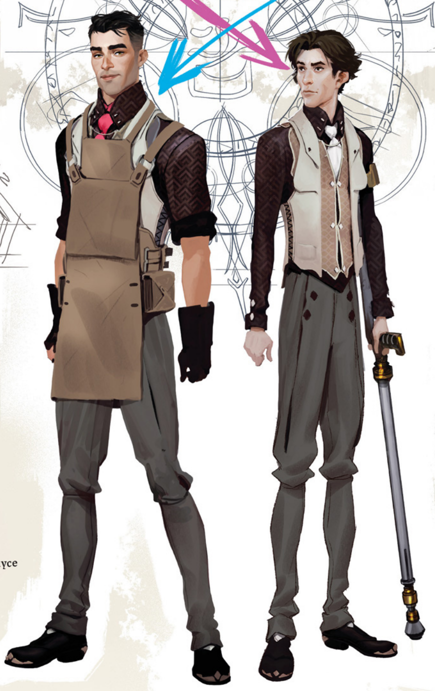
Notes investigating the runes from Jayce and Viktor's notebooks

BOYS of PROGRESS

VIKTOR & JAYCE



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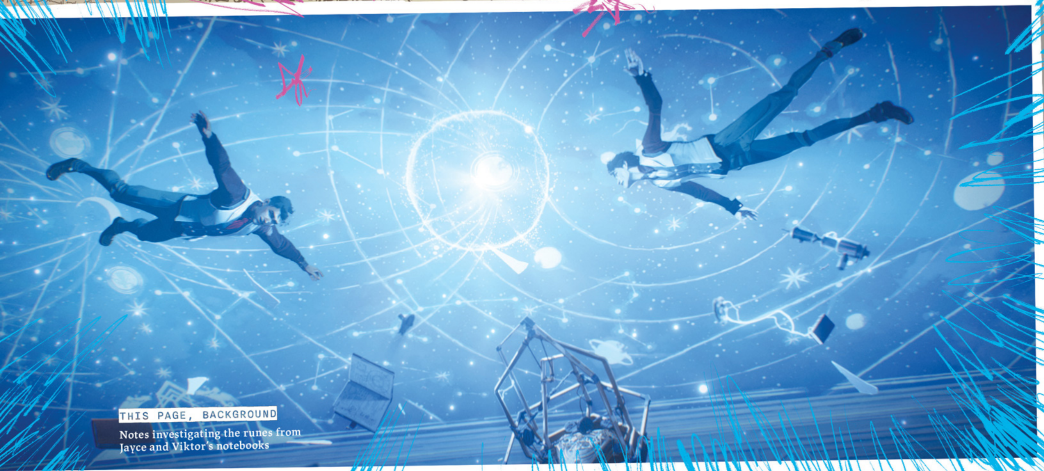
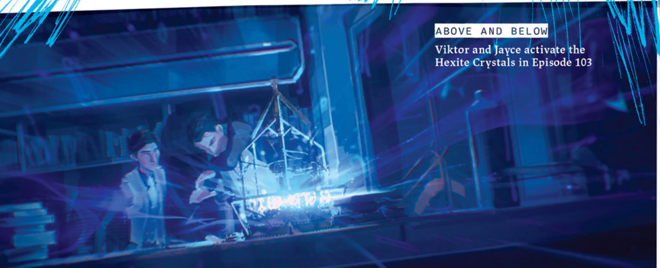
Concept art for Jayce and Viktor





ABOVE AND BELOW

Viktor and Jayce activate the Hexite Crystals in Episode 103

VIKTOR AND JAYCE ARE AMONG THE characters who changed the most, both physically and psychologically, over the span of *Arcane.* They start off as close colleagues and friends, working together in a Piltover lab. They end up making radically different choices and eventually drift into radically different directions with radically different end games. Jayce and Viktor represent two sides of the same coin, with shifting views on power and the use of hextech.

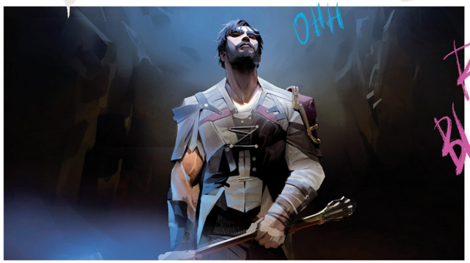
"When Christian told us about Viktor and Jayce, he used Apple as a comparison," Fortiche's Pascal Charrue said. "You had Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak. Wozniak would be Viktor: He's the true genius who creates Apple, whereas Steve Jobs is its public face, like Jayce is the public face of hextech."

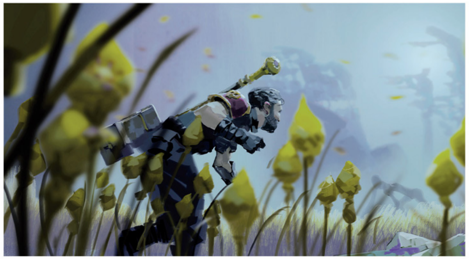
The writing team greatly benefited from the input of Amanda Overton, who not only is an avid gamer (though not so much *League of Legends* as *Teamfight Tactics*, "just to kind of familiarize myself more with the characters and the fans," she said) but had studied molecular biology and been a geneticist in a previous life. "I was able to draw on my science background to inform Viktor and Jayce, and their relationship and understanding," Overton said. "One of the lines Jayce says to Ambessa is that failure is ninety-seven percent of science or something. I was like, 'Yeah, I wrote that because that's what science is: No one understands that science is ninety-seven percent failure.'"

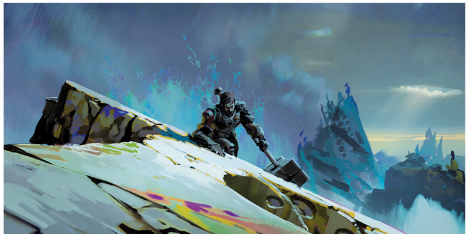
Paul Bellezza, who was one of the first ten employees at Riot, oversaw Jayce's creation, and he remembers him as being somewhat tricky to nail down because of his symbolic importance. "We wanted something that felt aspirational because this was *League*'s one hundredth character. We wanted something we were proud of because we'd gotten to this milestone in the game development and production. So that went into his personality: He's someone who could be looked to as aspirational. We wanted him to be the Man of Tomorrow, the future-facing visionary. We had a lot of art created for that but nothing was really sticking. Then a drawing got made where he was in this collared jacket, almost like a World War II bomber jacket, and he had this big staff and hammer. It was just like that look of a World War II–era hero, kind of a retro-future type of deal. We felt, 'We don't have someone like this, it feels pretty cool.'"

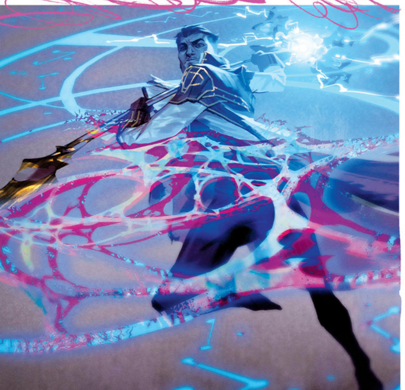
"We created that," Bellezza said, "and then we thought that he would be a good foil for Viktor. We wondered what if they are enemies, where Jayce represents technology helping people and Viktor's like, 'Technology helps people but we do it by taking over organic life?'" Bellezza is pleased that *Arcane* added a layer of complication to the relatively simple plot point of Jayce and Viktor being at odds by having them start off as friends. "They were brothers then they had their falling-out," he said. "They've elevated both of those characters through that."

The longtime Riot artist Jason Chan was part of the team working closely with Fortiche on Season 2, and he singles out the evolution of Jayce's outfit to illustrate the thinking behind the creation of a character's look. In the first season, Jayce is a handsome but also slightly nerdy scientist. He is confident in his mind's abilities and passionate about his work, but somewhat hesitant about how to handle his responsibilities—which make him look as if he is somewhat under Mel's spell at first. As the show progresses, he undergoes a series of tests and trials, and his appearance changes accordingly. "High level, we really wanted to highlight his growth, or his change," Chan said. "He's no longer the naive scientist. We wanted him to be darker, where he's carrying that trauma from seeing the other world and the burden of knowing what's coming. We were trying to figure out a way to carry that on him. Also, thinking about what makes sense at the moment, he probably won't take the time to get a haircut, a care pack, or a quick shower," Chan continued. "With his clothes, we always wanted to go with some kind of trench coat or a big scientist's coat, but more rugged. We also played around with stuff like, 'Is he wearing lots of armor because he knows the big battle's coming?' We did have a version at some point with lots of armor, and ended with kind of a mix where he has a few pieces of armor. There were a lot of iterations trying to find a good balance of who this Jayce is, because this version is beyond what's in the video game, which is closer to Season 1 Jayce. We took him beyond the established character arc."



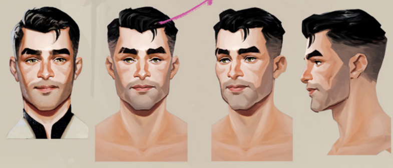


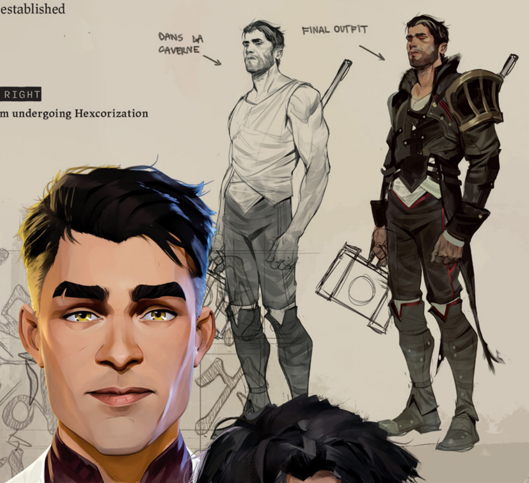


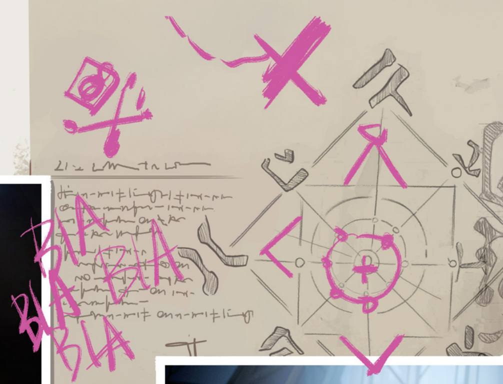


CLOCKWISE FROM TOP

Jayce traveler in front of Viktor; Jayce infiltrating the commune; Jayce in alternate universe







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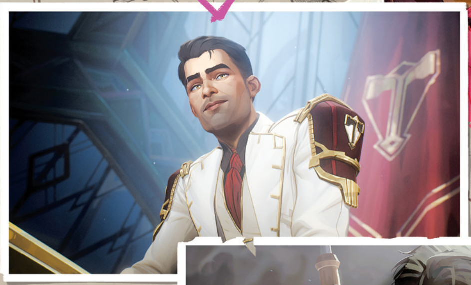
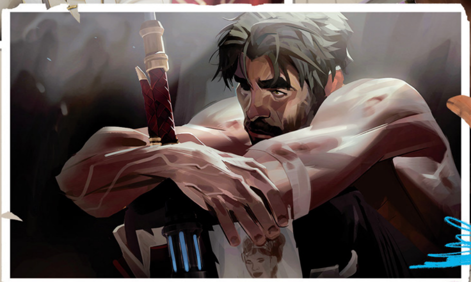
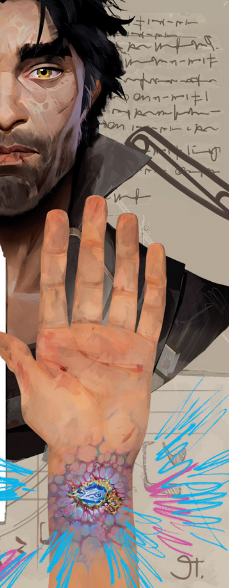
Concept art for Jayce in Seasons 1 and 2

BOTTOM RIGHT

Jayce's arm undergoing Hexcorization

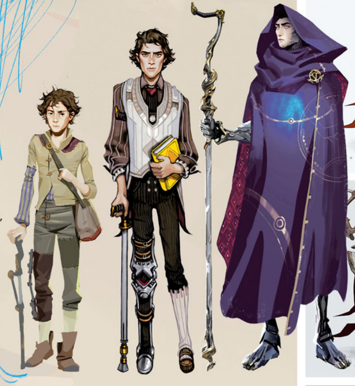






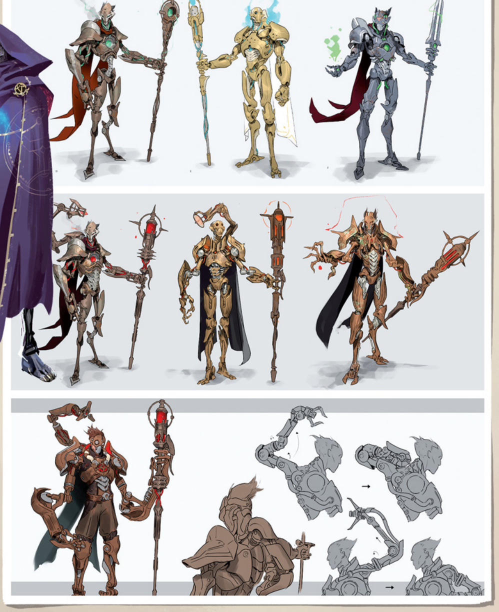
ABOVE AND RIGHT

Jayce gives his Progress Day speech in Episode 104; Jayce trapped in an alternate future in Episode 207



RIGHT

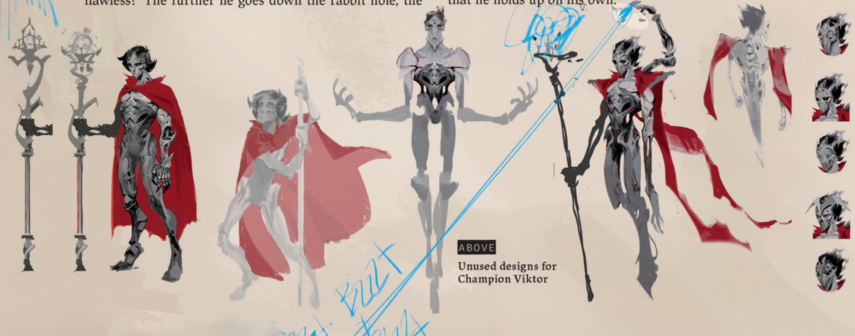
Concept art for young Viktor, Season 1 Viktor, and Herald Viktor



Viktor went through a similarly drastic evolution, even more so since he became something perhaps not quite human, or beyond human. When we first meet him, he's a dedicated scientist, just like his colleague Jayce, but we can sense a haunted dimension—perhaps partly caused, or precipitated by, his disability. As the story goes on, we learn more about Viktor's background, his dreams and goals, but that does not make him any less complex. After almost dying in the attack on Piltover at the end of Season 1, Viktor is saved and kept alive by Hexcore. This initiates a physical and mental transformation—referred to as the "Glorious Evolution"—where he leaves humanity as we know it behind and evolves into a different kind of being. "He's always been introverted, he was sick, he wanted to help others and himself as well," Charrue said of how Viktor starts off in Season 1. "Then he becomes a leading character, with his own ideas and personality. He changes—this is why we all like Viktor a lot here. But even when he turns bad, he's not that bad and is persuaded he's doing good for humanity."

For Linke, the changes that Viktor goes through—and those that his relationship with Jayce undergo—illustrate the perils of obsessive quests. "The idea for him always was to lose more and more humanity," he said. "It starts with just him fixing his imperfections, like, 'Oh, I can walk better, I can have a straighter spine,' but at some point it becomes 'How do I become perfect? How do I become flawless?' The further he goes down the rabbit hole, the more he loses what makes him human. We see Viktor evolve, and lose parts of his humanity. First it's limbs, then in Season 2 his eyes look different—subtle things like the shape and the color of the iris."

In a bold move, the new Viktor is being introduced back into *League of Legends* as a reinvented champion. Usually, Riot and Fortiche would have to balance their needs in terms of making sure a character worked for the show and for the game—the needs of each had to be carefully weighed. But in the case of the new Viktor, much of the French studio's work is preserved as the scientist transfers back to *League of Legends*. "They took the opportunity to really flesh it out," Ray said of Viktor's new story. "Instead of augmenting himself cybernetically, he has this augmentation that's more organic and more fluid—a way more compelling character. His evolution is so different now that he holds up on his own."

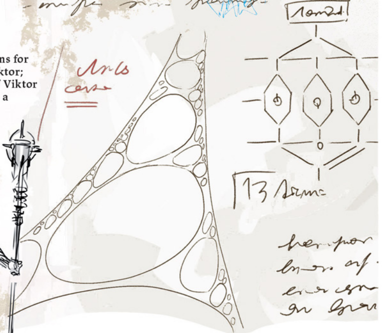


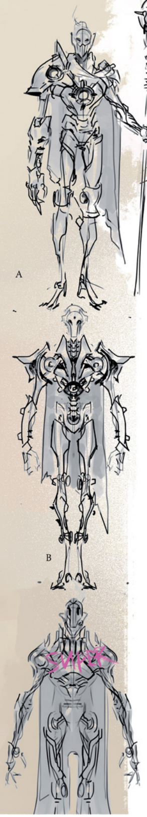
ABOVE

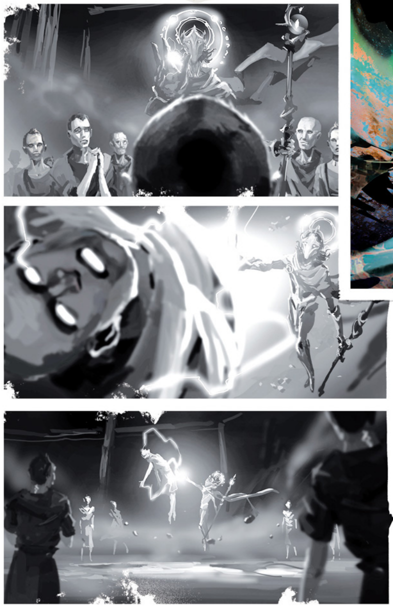
Unused designs for Champion Viktor

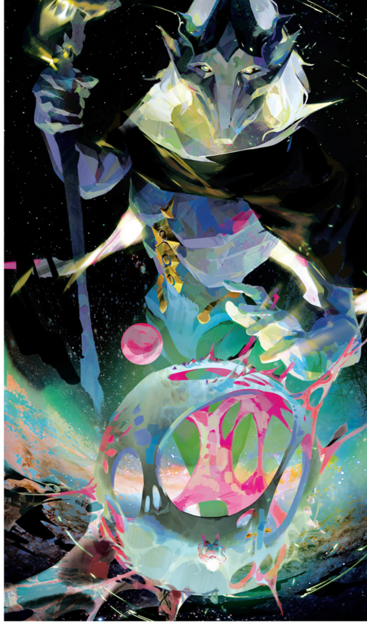
BELOW

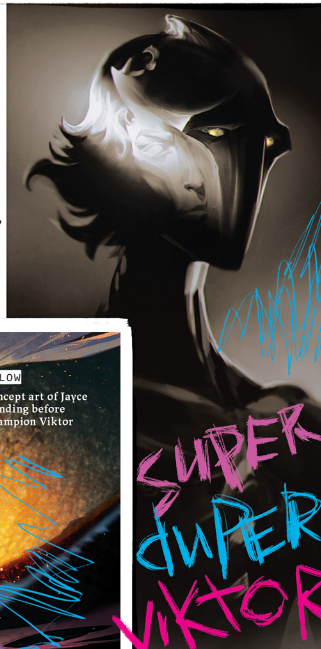
Unused designs for Champion Viktor; storyboard of Viktor transforming a follower

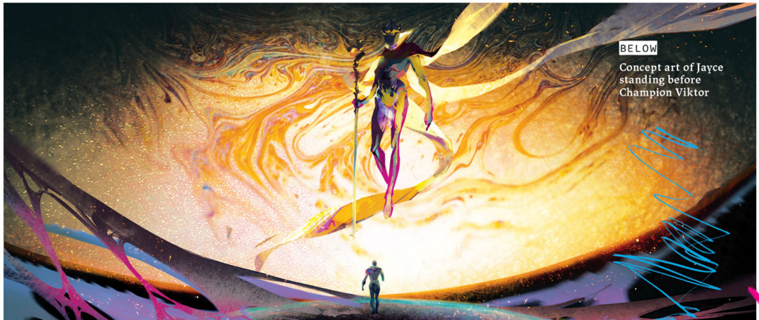






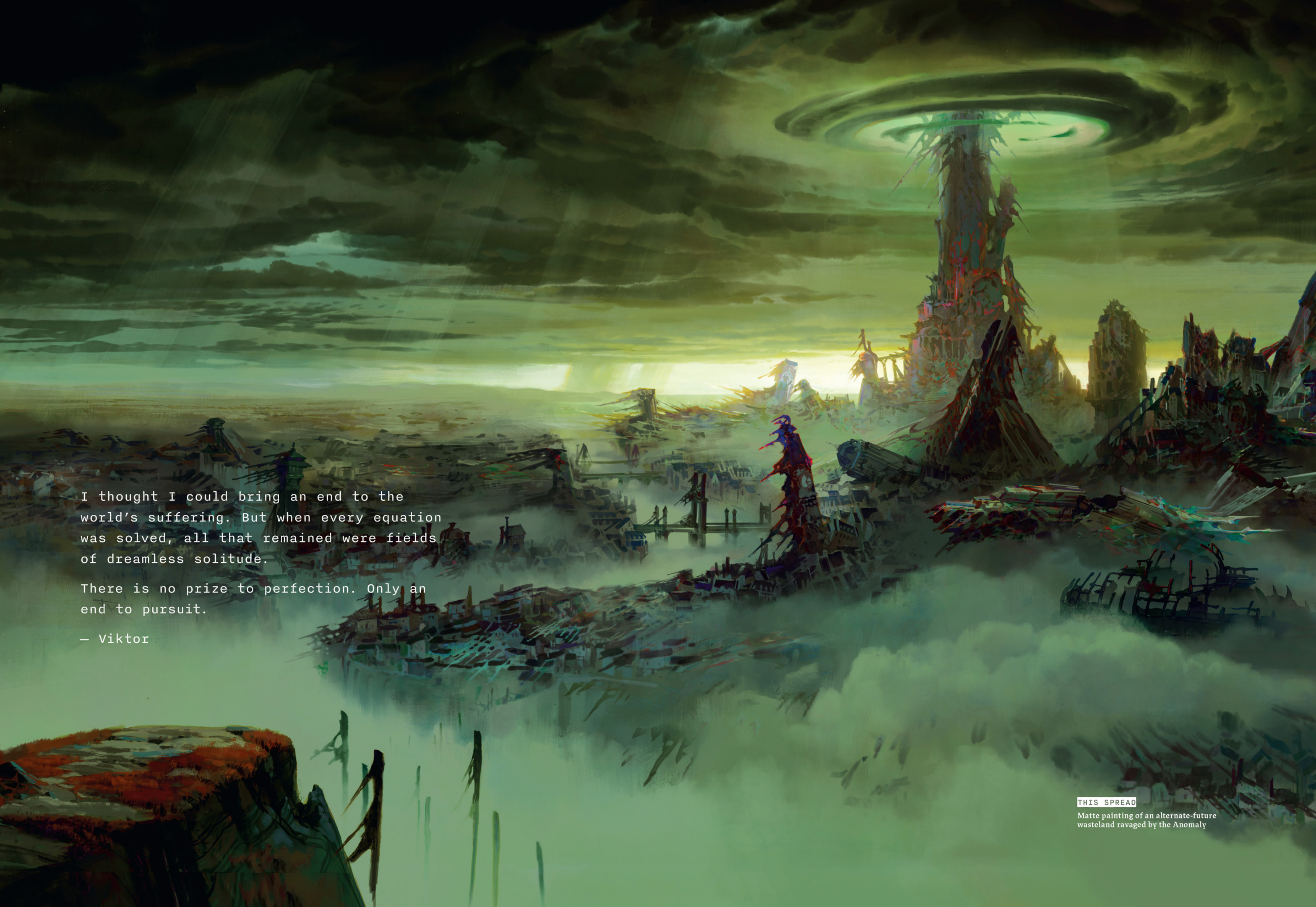






BELOW

Concept art of Jayce standing before Champion Viktor



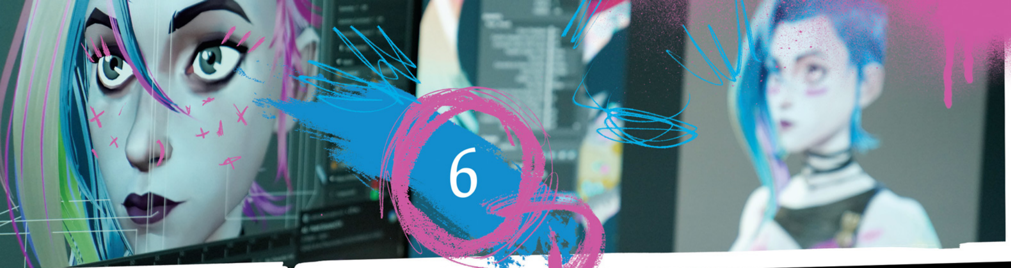
I thought I could bring an end to the world's suffering. But when every equation was solved, all that remained were fields of dreamless solitude.

There is no prize to perfection. Only an end to pursuit.

— Viktor

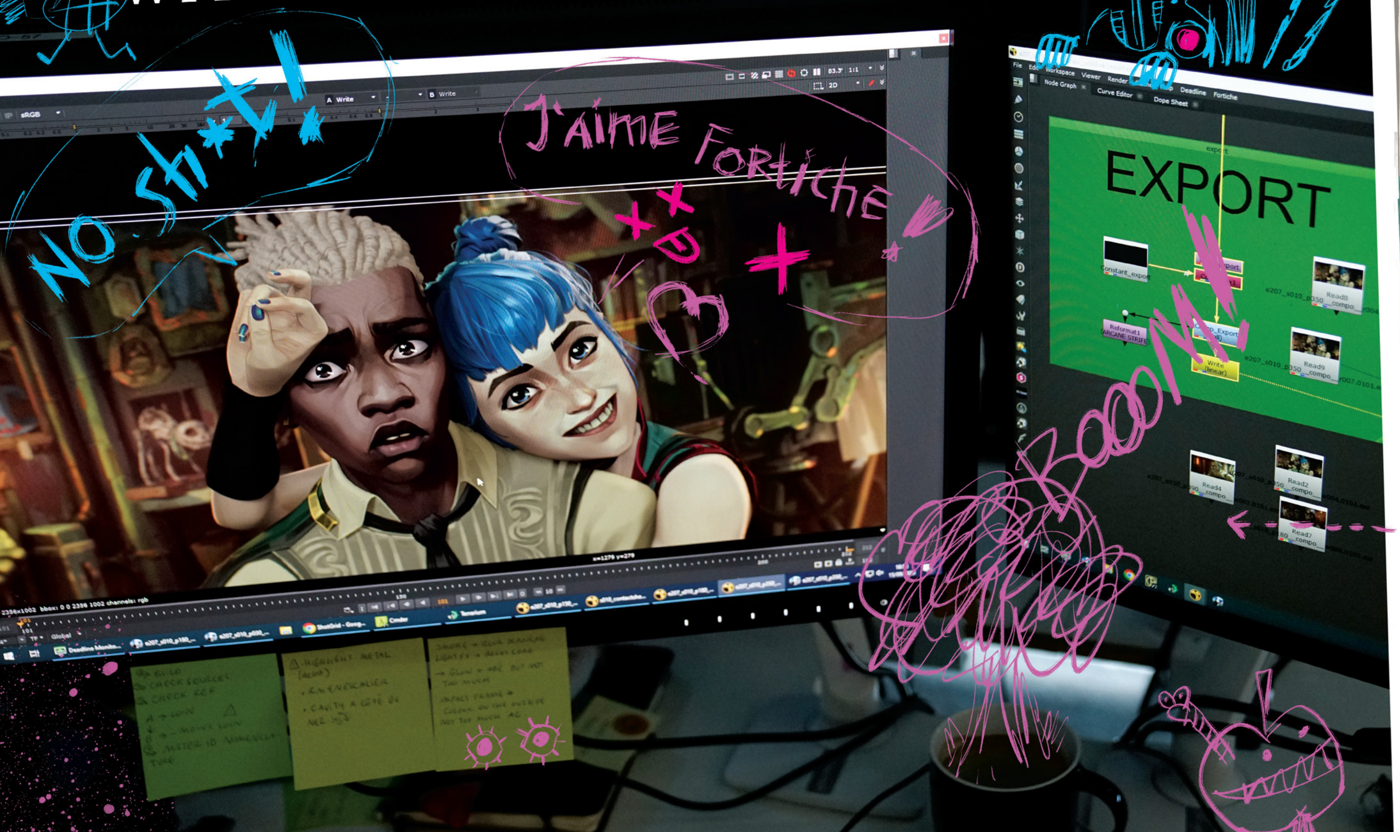
THIS SPREAD

Matte painting of an alternate-future wasteland ravaged by the Anomaly



6

A RIGOROUS PROCESS WITH ROOM FOR PLAY



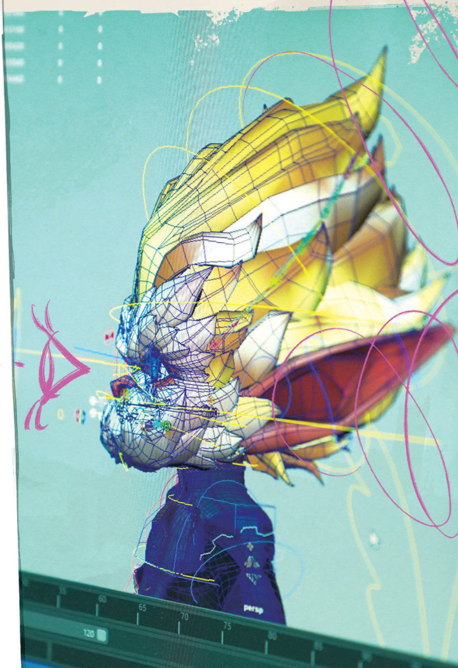
CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT

Rigging for Season 2 Jinx; rigging for Heimerdinger; work-in-progress compositing of alternate-universe Ekko and Powder in Episode 207

FANS KNOW THIS, BUT IT BEARS REPEATING: THE world of modern animation is deeply rich, encompassing a dizzying variety of aesthetics and techniques, from 2-D and 3-D to stop-motion and claymation, to hand painting to photo-realism. *Arcane* stands defiantly on its own in how it was conceived and made, and in its narrative and aesthetic choices. Over the nine years that Fortiche worked on the show, it developed, through trial and error, an approach that reflects its use of a hybrid mix of painterly 2-D animation and 3-D, 360-degree CGI models. The result: sheer visual beauty from the first and realistic depth from the second.

And yet the commingling of the two was not always easy. "Fortiche is using a 3-D tool it doesn't like—it's fighting against it," Arnaud Delord said.

He was speaking in jest . . . mostly. For the French studio, "the hardest part is finding the right balance between 2-D and 3-D," Delord's friend and associate Jérôme Combe said. "Embedded in Fortiche's DNA is to do 3-D that looks like 2-D. Our images aim to look like concept art for animation. We've always looked at Pixar art books thinking that we wanted to have the quality of the drawing and sketches on the screen. When you look at really old Disney, it all boils down to the quality of the artwork—*Bambi* has magnificent landscapes." Combe also pointed out that eventually computer-generated 3-D animation is going to age, "Whereas if the image is based on handmade artistic talent, that's going to perdure."



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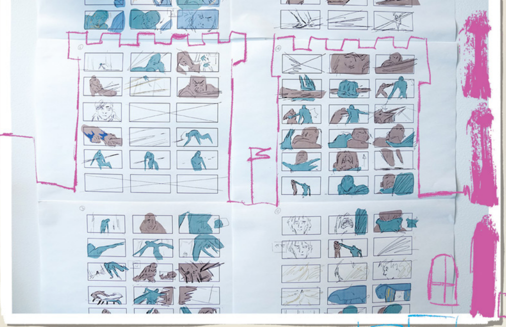
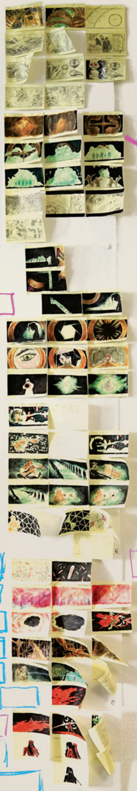
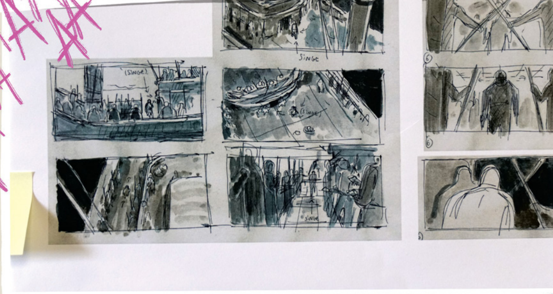
Storyboards for fight scene between Jayce, Mel, and Viktor's minion; Fortiche artist working on a matte painting

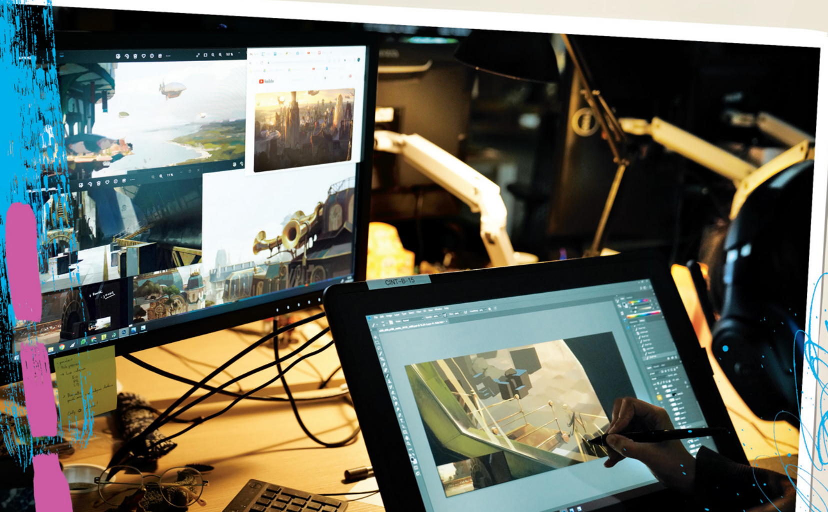
Contrary to how one might think a profoundly creative endeavor is undertaken, making *Arcane* required following specific, technical steps in a productive order. Point persons on both sides of the Atlantic—most notably producer Melinda Dilger at Riot in Los Angeles and managing director Hervé Dupont at Fortiche in Paris—made sure communication channels were always open and everything got done in time. Such a feat was not always easy from a logistics standpoint, especially with a nine-hour time difference. Generally speaking, when animated projects originate in the United States and are based on American intellectual properties, the design work is done in the U.S., as well as storyboards and animatics, then everything is sent overseas for the next steps, from layout to animation to compositing. Fortiche, however, was a creative partner rather than a distant vendor, so the breakdown of responsibilities on *Arcane* was completely different. The design and animation of the series were primarily handled at Fortiche's office in Paris and at its satellite studios in Montpellier, France, and Las Palmas, Spain, with regular input and support from Riot. "They offered to set up studios because there came a time when we were wondering how to rationalize costs," Dupont said. "The usual thing in series is to seek out vendors. We carried out tests at these vendor companies. They were more or less conclusive, but [these companies] mainly had less experience. Ultimately, setting up these two studios was as competitive as outsourcing."

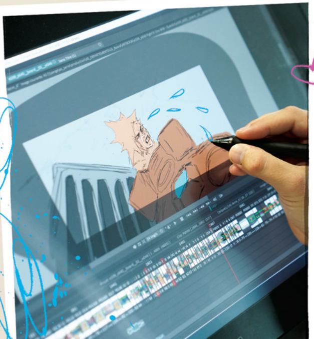
The flowchart of *Arcane*'s production process began with the script written in Los Angeles. The script would then make its way to the directors and storyboarders in Paris. The storyboarders would start by creating mood boards. "They can mean many different things," said Quentin Reubrecht, who, like his fellow lead storyboarders, headed a team of five artists, with each team handling an episode. (More artists worked on Episode 209, as its complexity required additional hands on deck.) "It can be 'Look at the way the artists direct your gaze in these paintings—how can we do something similar on-screen?' Sometimes it's scenes from a movie, for example 'We like the way [Brian] De Palma handled the characters, the cameras, and the lighting; so let's try to do something along the same lines.' We also talked about music. We do a mood board for every scene in the script. For us, the mood board is as important as the screenplay because there are mise en scène ideas that aren't in the screenplay and having a mood board helps us refine the way we interpret it. The harder the scene is to conceptualize, the more mood boards we create."











LEFT CENTER

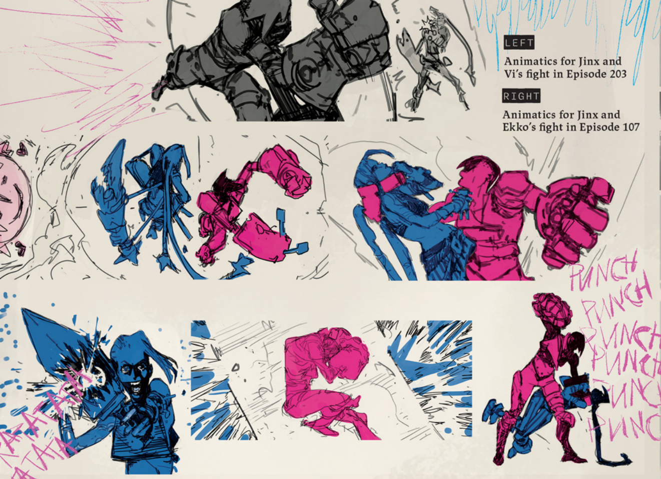
Post-it storyboards for Caitlyn's strike force attacking Jinx's hideout

ABOVE

Storyboard of Viktor hexcorizing Warwick; storyboards of Singed on a Noxian ship

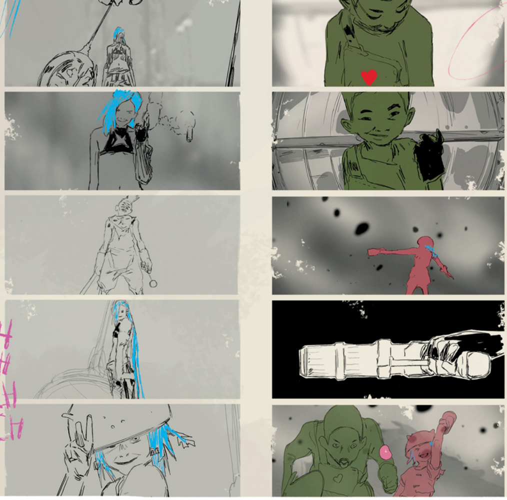
BELOW

Fortiche artist working on storyboards for Episode 203



LEFT

Animatics for Jinx and Vi's fight in Episode 203



RIGHT

Animatics for Jinx and Ekko's fight in Episode 107

Naturally, the storyboard teams worked closely with the directors, who each had their own touch and sensibility. "Sometimes they have specific shots in mind and tell us 'We absolutely need this,'" Reubrecht said. "In Episode 203, for the scene where Jinx is fighting Vi while Jayce and Ekko are underground discovering magic, I worked on the magic part with Ekko, Jayce, and Heimerdinger. Arnaud [Delord] was suggesting some shots and effects he was keen on, like the shot where all the Jayces are lined up and the camera comes toward the Anomaly. We talked about it for a long time, he described what he wanted and I implemented it."

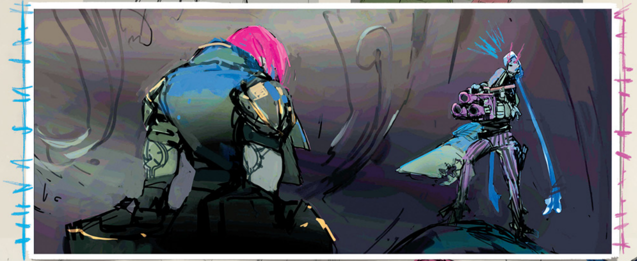
The storyboarders and directors had a striking amount of latitude because the scripts, while detailed, left room for creative interpretation and problem-solving. Talking about Episode 107's signature fight on the bridge, Reubrecht explained that, "The scripts are not saying 'Ekko delivers a right hook, Jinx takes off.' It's more along the lines of 'Jinx is emotionally unstable, she's facing Ekko. Ekko is also ill at ease. They face each other while thinking back to their childhood.' We try to execute the directors' intent as much as possible. Our work is almost like a mental translation: We have to understand what they want, sometimes we have to read between the lines. For example, let's say they write a scene to showcase a character. The point is not so much what happens in the scene as how to highlight the character—that is the ultimate goal of that scene."

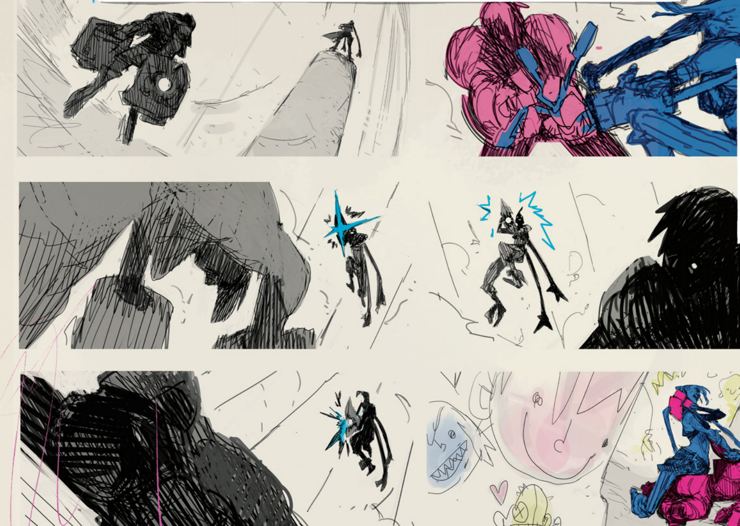
"We have overarching codes but within those each storyboarder brings their own touch to the scene they work on, which is amazing to me," said Silvia Martelossi, a member of that department. "I think you can spot a storyboarder's individuality in each episode, in each scene."

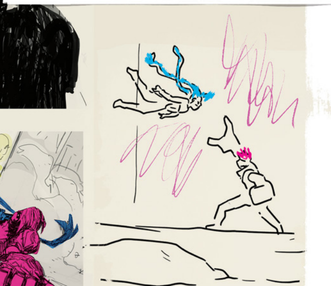
The storyboard teams worked closely with editors like Nazim Meslem, who pointed out a major difference between live-action editing and animation editing: The latter takes place before anything has been shot. This means the editing teams work in lockstep with the storyboards. "We use the images and the dialogues, and we try to bring them to life," Meslem said. "We can have a lot of input at the editing stage because nothing has been shot yet. What we bring is linked to mise en scène: We try to help with the storytelling only through visuals. I'd say that's when we come up with the final version of the script."

Animatics are another key stage, when the storyboard essentially begins to move and an episode's rhythm emerges. Amanda Overton pointed out that just because a script is sent to Paris, that doesn't mean it's set in stone. "Another reason *Arcane* is so good is because we're able to do a lot of rewriting in the animatics," she said. "In Season 1, probably Episode 5 is the closest from the script to the animatic. There was a constant question of 'How can we tell more story or the same amount of story in less time?' We came up with a lot of creative fixes and spent a lot of time in the animatic stage rewriting and crafting things to make sure it worked."

The various steps included interconnected teams and individuals. Breaking down the various positions in the fabrication chain, animation supervisor Martial André had a simile: "I always compare making an animated project to cooking, but cooking in a starred restaurant," he said with a laugh. "There everybody is a cook, but everybody has a different specialized job: Someone makes sauces, someone makes cold appetizers, someone makes desserts, and so on. It's a bit like that with us—we split up the work."





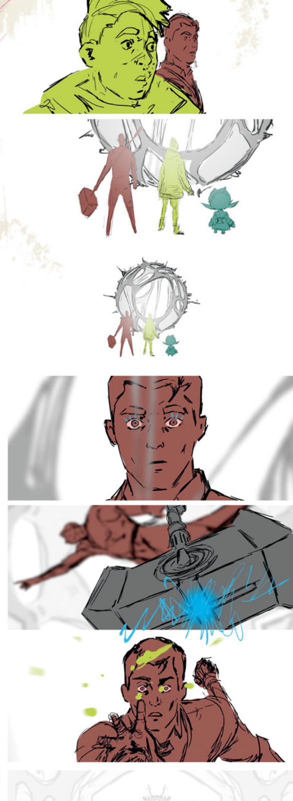


RIGHT AND BELOW

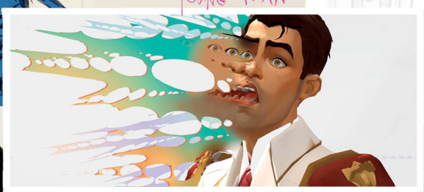
Animatics for Ekko, Heimerdinger, and Jayce discovering the Anomaly in Episode 203

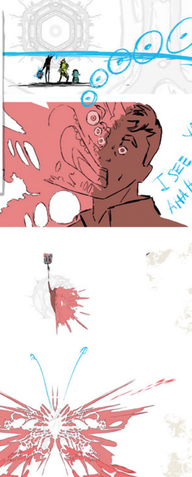
LEFT

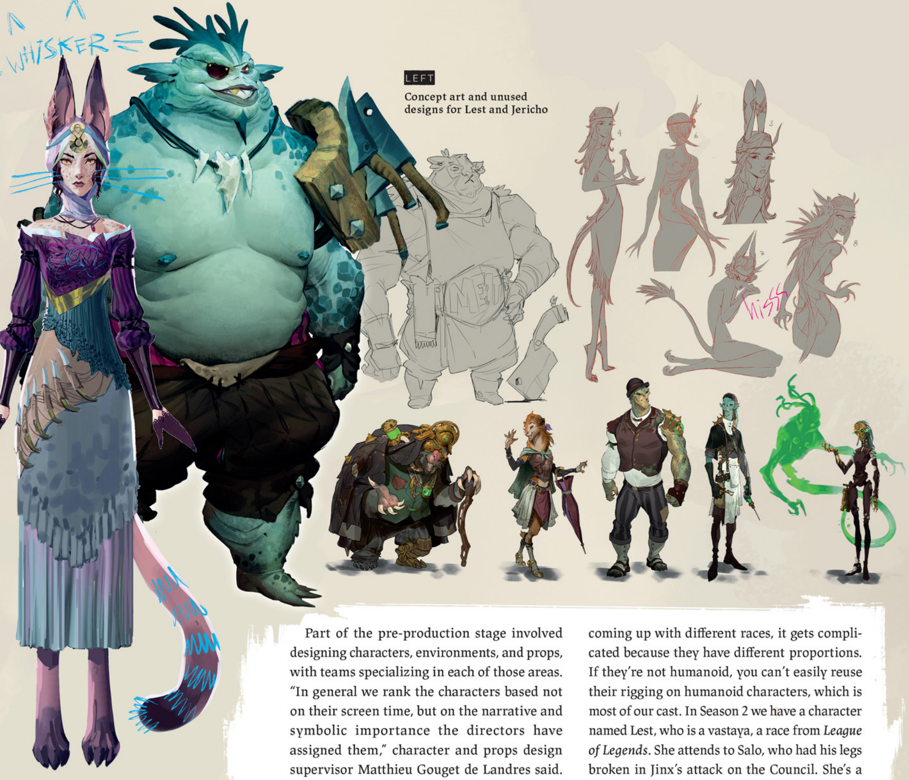
Animatics for Jinx and Vi's fight in Episode 203



WHAT A HANDSOME YOUNG MAN







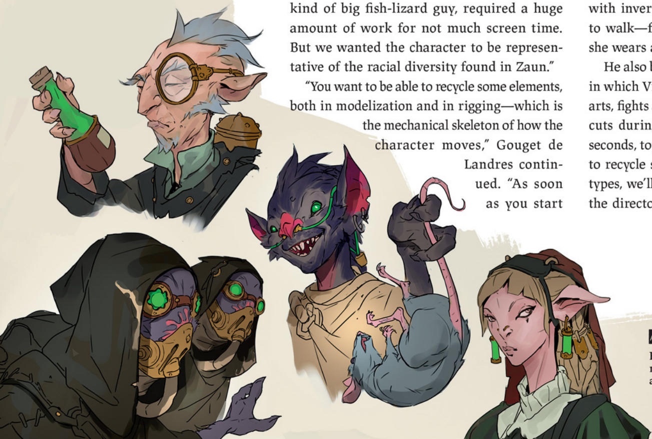
LEFT

Concept art and unused designs for Lest and Jericho

Part of the pre-production stage involved designing characters, environments, and props, with teams specializing in each of those areas. "In general we rank the characters based not on their screen time, but on the narrative and symbolic importance the directors have assigned them," character and props design supervisor Matthieu Gouget de Landres said. "For example a character may appear in only a shot or a scene but could have an outsize meaning. The sushi vendor in Season 1, a kind of big fish-lizard guy, required a huge amount of work for not much screen time. But we wanted the character to be representative of the racial diversity found in Zaun."

"You want to be able to recycle some elements, both in modelization and in rigging—which is the mechanical skeleton of how the character moves," Gouget de Landres continued. "As soon as you start coming up with different races, it gets complicated because they have different proportions. If they're not humanoid, you can't easily reuse their rigging on humanoid characters, which is most of our cast. In Season 2 we have a character named Lest, who is a vastaya, a race from *League of Legends*. She attends to Salo, who had his legs broken in Jinx's attack on the Council. She's a kind of cat-woman, and [some] vastaya have inverted legs. It would have meant creating a new marionette, at least from the waist down, with inverted legs—which means a new way to walk—for one character." He laughed. "So she wears a dress."

He also brought up a montage in Episode 205 in which Vi, who has been doing mixed martial arts, fights a series of opponents. "There are fast cuts during which you see each guy for two seconds, tops. So we thought, 'Okay, we're going to recycle some people, we'll reuse some body types, we'll tweak some pre-existing stuff.' But the directors were like, 'No, no, no! We want some badass characters!' We ended up designing a whole bunch of new badass characters, all different from one another, and then modeling, texture, and rigging had to work on brand-new stuff—all that for two seconds of screen time for each character. The upside of creating a whole character, even if you only see him from the shoulders up in that scene, is that you can reuse him somewhere else. So maybe some of the guys in that fight sequence with Vi pop up in the battle in the last episode. It helps fill the scene and also provides a small wink: 'Ah yeah, we saw that guy earlier.' It helps create a richer world."



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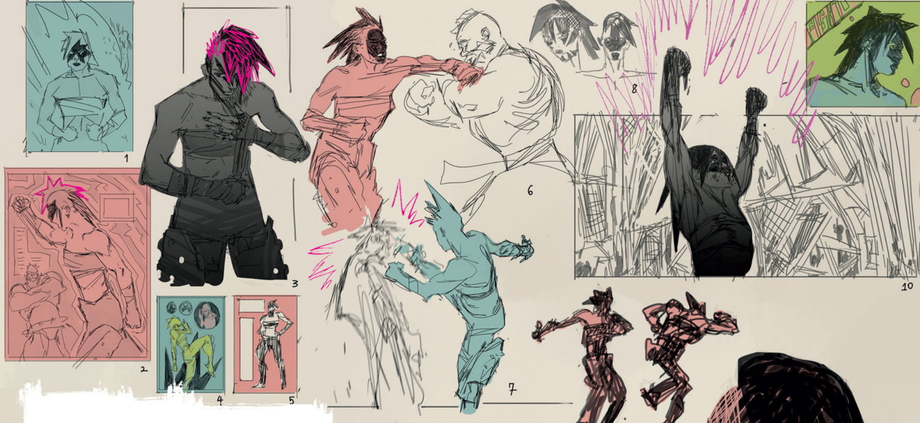
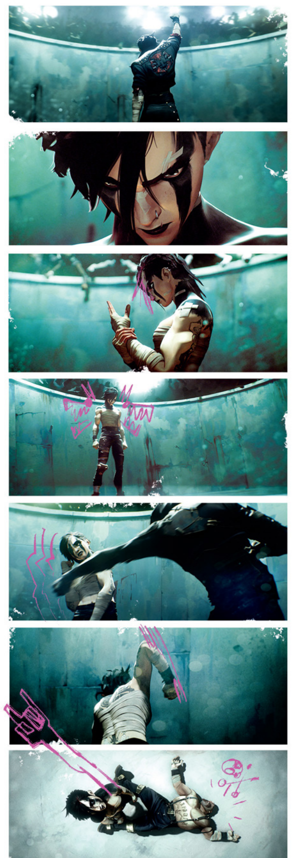
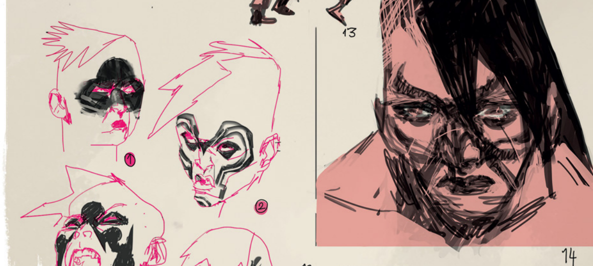
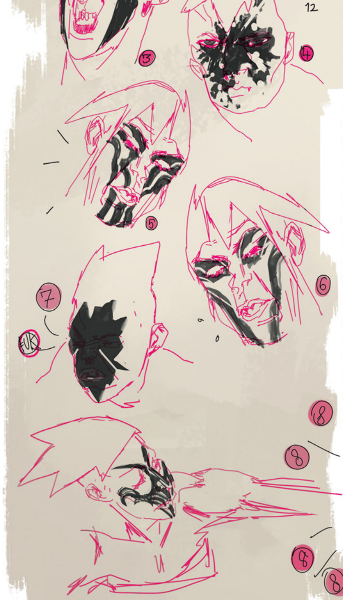
Explorations for the various non-human characters in Piltover and Zaun









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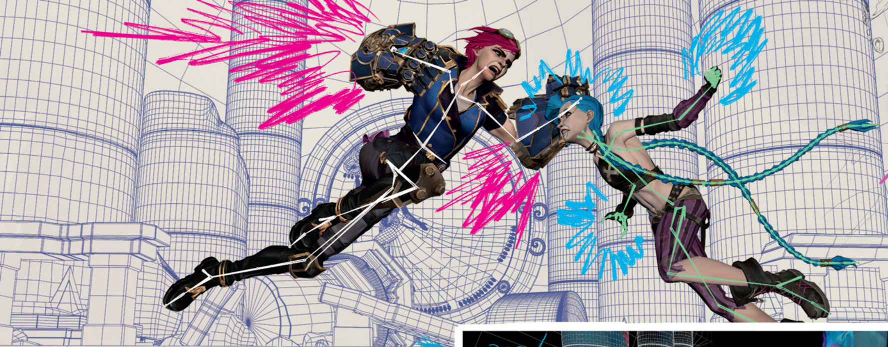
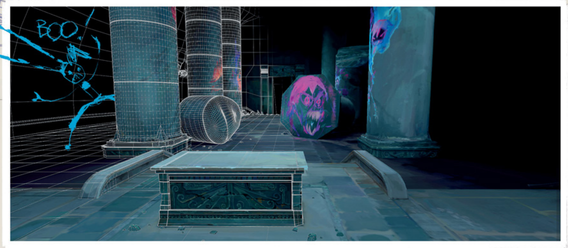
Design explorations and stills of Cage-fighter Vi in the intro of Episode 205





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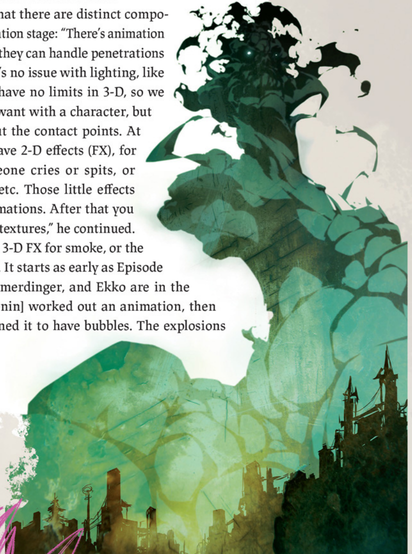
Vi and Jinx animated showing the rigging setup for their fight in Episode 203; Ambessa animated using the rigging setup; Mylo and Claggor animated using the rigging setup

Once the rigging was done, another team took over. “What we do as animators lands in the middle of the process, at the stage where you make the puppet move,” Martial André said. “As they say in the Disney book *The Illusion of Life*, we inject life into the characters: We give them movement, emotions, action. Animators are movement artists.”

André explained that there are distinct components within the animation stage: “There’s animation fix (Fix Anim), where they can handle penetrations and contacts so there’s no issue with lighting, like weird shadows—we have no limits in 3-D, so we can do whatever we want with a character, but you have to figure out the contact points. At the same time you have 2-D effects (FX), for example when someone cries or spits, or when there’s blood, etc. Those little effects are added to our animations. After that you get into clothes, hair, textures,” he continued. “Sometimes you have 3-D FX for smoke, or the Anomaly in Season 2. It starts as early as Episode 203, when Jayce, Heimerdinger, and Ekko are in the lab. Jean-Charles [Gonin] worked out an animation, then the 3-D FX team refined it to have bubbles. The explosions were handled in 2-D. That’s the Fortiche M.O.: always combining 2-D and 3-D. At the end of the assembly line you have compositing, which brings it all together into a cohesive whole.”

As with storyboards and animatics, the editors were never far away during that stage. “We also come in at the end of the animation stage, just before compositing,” Meslem said. “We try to get as close as possible to the final timing. We work in parallel with sound. Pretty much everything is done in parallel. Editors are at the crossroads: When a team is done, it comes back to us and we dispatch things out.”

While the big whiz-bang scenes have turned into *Arcane*’s signature, propelled by dynamic, precise directing, the show’s staying power may be found in more intimate scenes that hang on a rare balance of acting, design, and animation. Those scenes may be set in a fantastical world, but viewers feel as if they are watching real people with a past and a personality, moods and dreams. Anne-Laure To, who is artistic supervisor at Fortiche, praises the action sequences: “The fight scenes are kinetic, the choreographies are fun to watch,” she said. But a key moment for her was not among them. “There was a scene in Episode 101 where Vander is arguing with Vi and I thought, ‘We’re really onto something here,’” To said. “It was an intimate moment and it felt very different from what we usually see in animation. It was inspired by live action but with the beauty of animation—it’s rare that real actors look that perfect in their movements, the subtlety of their gestures and so on,” she added with a laugh. “I was really moved because that intimate moment felt authentic. I think this mix can touch people who may not usually respond to animation, and maybe lure people who are more used to live action.”



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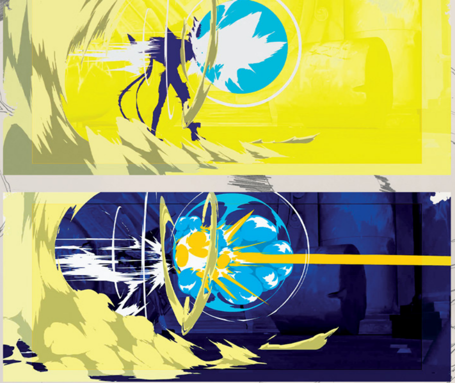
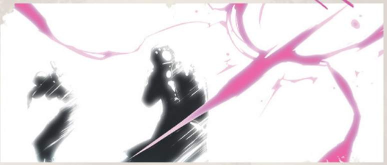
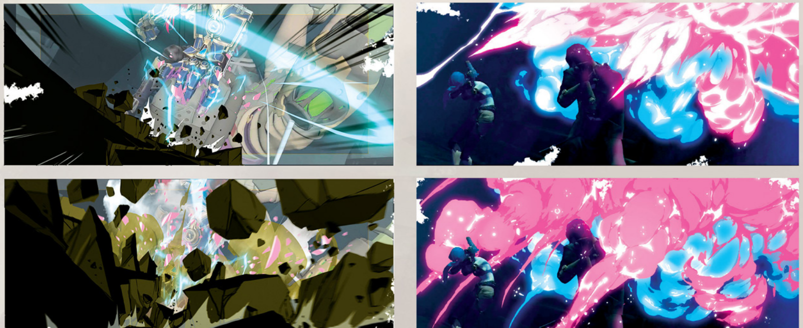
Janna’s temple; sketch of the Grey







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2-D FX for Episode 203

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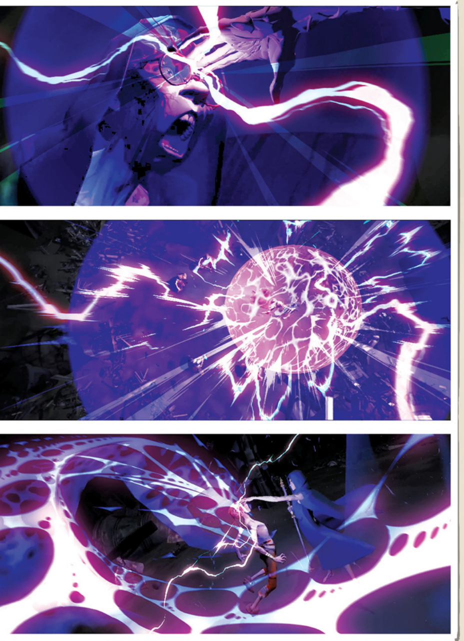
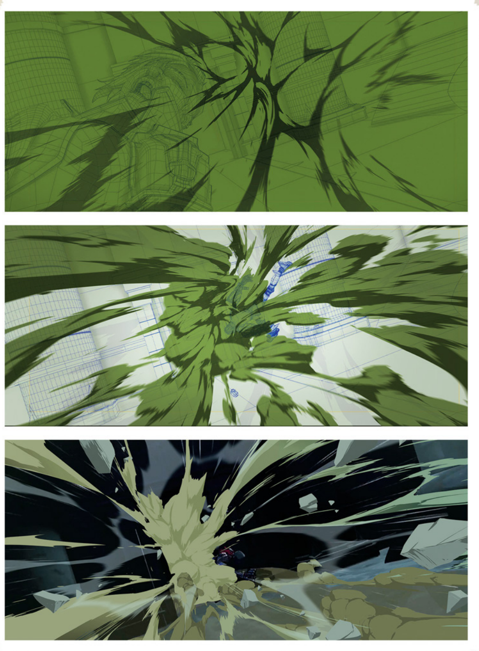
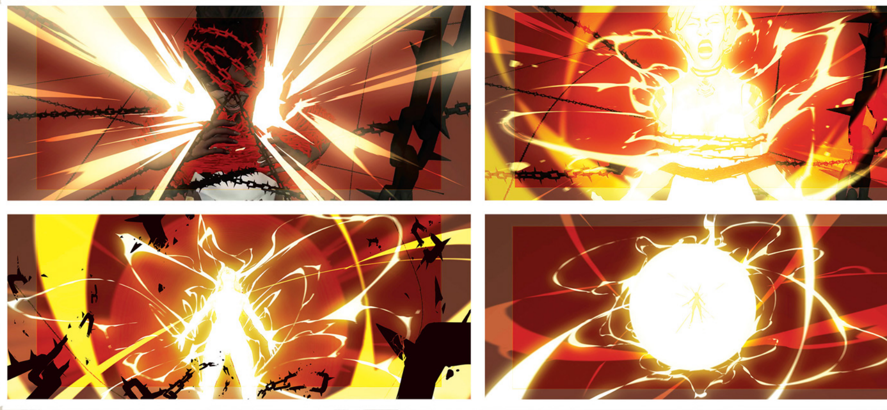
2-D FX exploration of Huck's hexcorization in Episode 202; 2-D FX explorations for the Grey blowing through Janna's Shrine in Episode 203; 2-D FX explorations of the Anomaly's effect on Fishbones in Episode 203

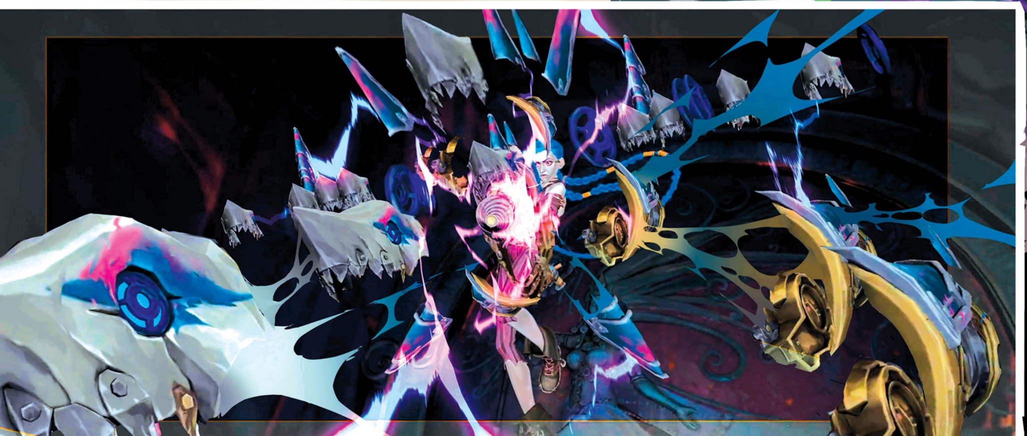
OPPOSITE PAGE, FROM TOP

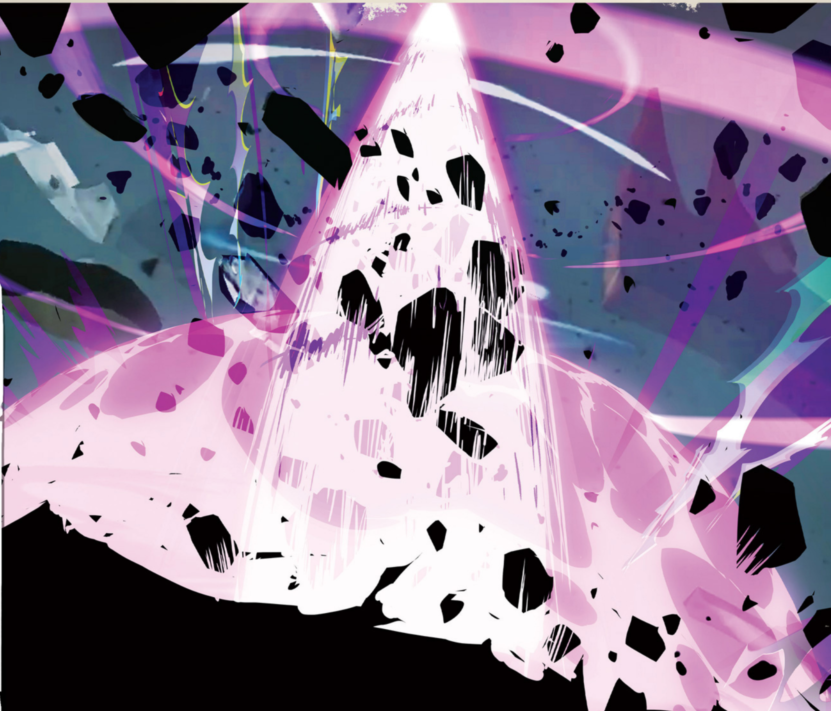
2-D FX explorations for Mel freeing herself from the Black Rose in Episode 205; 2-D FX exploration of the Mercury Hammer blasting through Viktor's sanctum in Episode 206

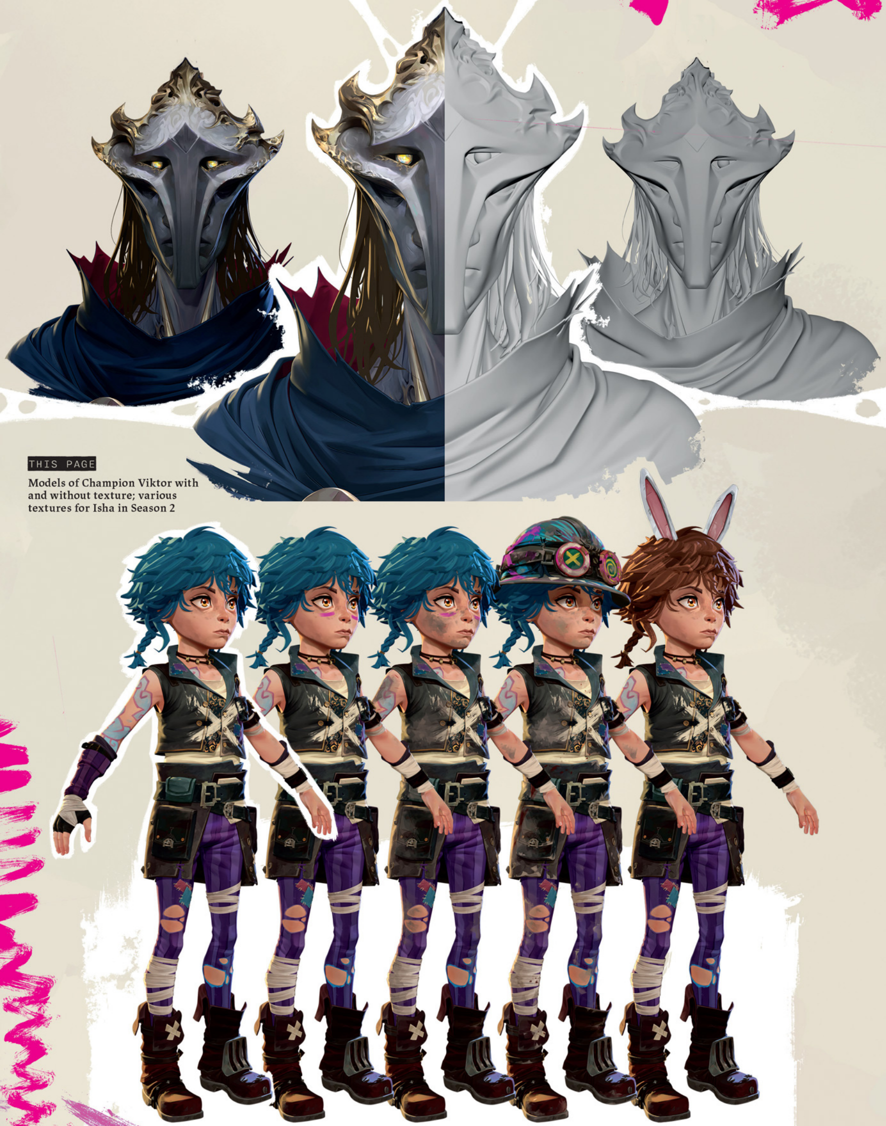












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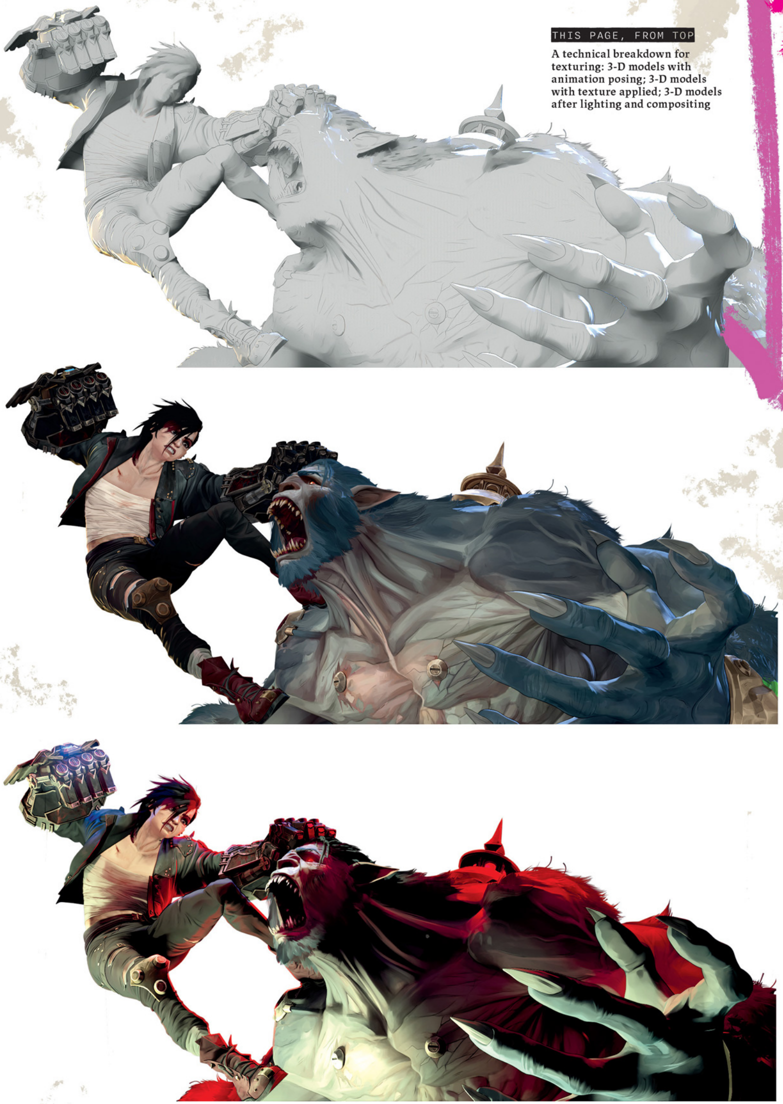
Models of Champion Viktor with and without texture; various textures for Isha in Season 2



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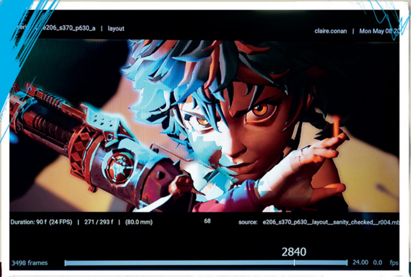
A technical breakdown for texturing: 3-D models with animation posing; 3-D models with texture applied; 3-D models after lighting and compositing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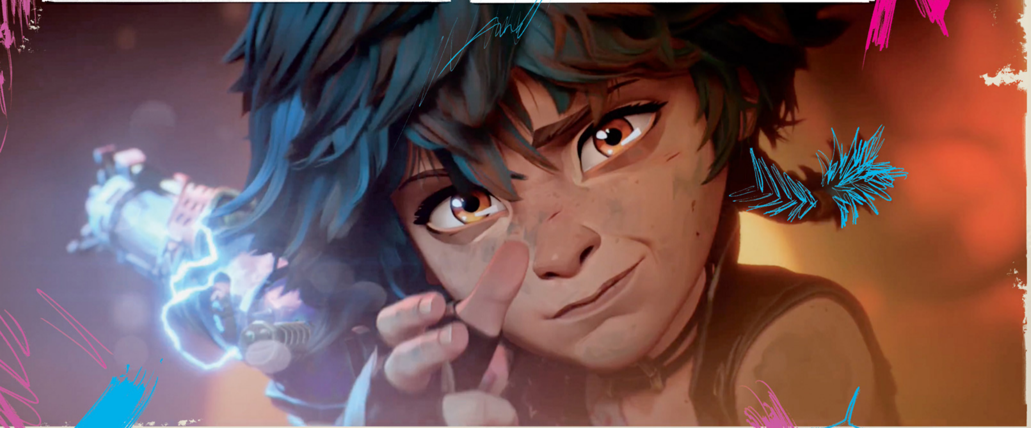
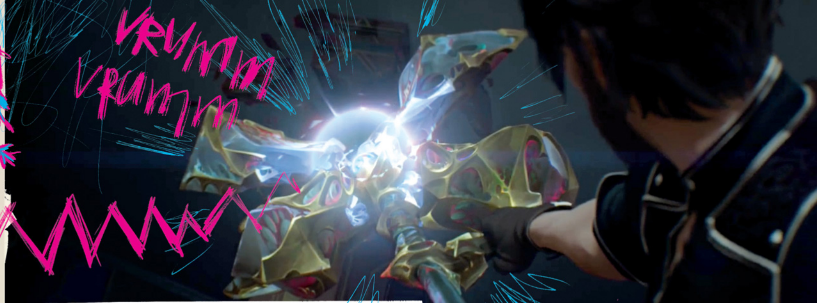


REAL-LIFE REFERENCES

ABOVE

Fortiche artist providing reference for Isha in Episode 206

ANIMATION SUPERVISORS MARTIAL ANDRÉ AND Jean-Charles Gonin used a lot of references from films and books, but they also used . . . themselves. At the Fortiche office in Paris, there is a room where animators can video themselves hitting various poses, which they can mine for the series. The space includes props like balls, plastic guns, and weights that can help the animators mimic objects used in the show. "It gives us references to represent mass—the hardest thing in animation is to give the impression that something has a heavy mass," André said. "If you don't put visual elements in animation, it can look like everything is floating. Jean-Charles is taller so he has a bigger wingspan. We don't weigh the same. We also have different personalities, which means we won't express fear the same way, for example. So we explore different paths, create different types of references, and see what we can use for any given character, how we can adapt it. In animation, especially in the more cartoony style, things tend to be exaggerated for the viewer's benefit. The key word for us is that it has to be as natural as possible—not realistic, but natural. When you watch it on screen, it must be fluid."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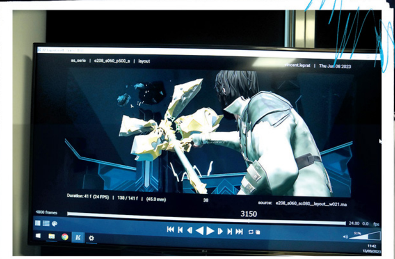
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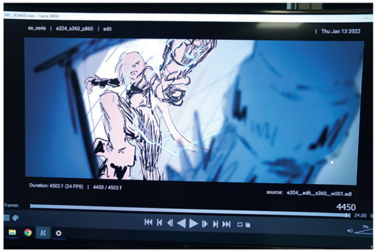
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Fortiche artist providing reference for Jayce in Episode 208

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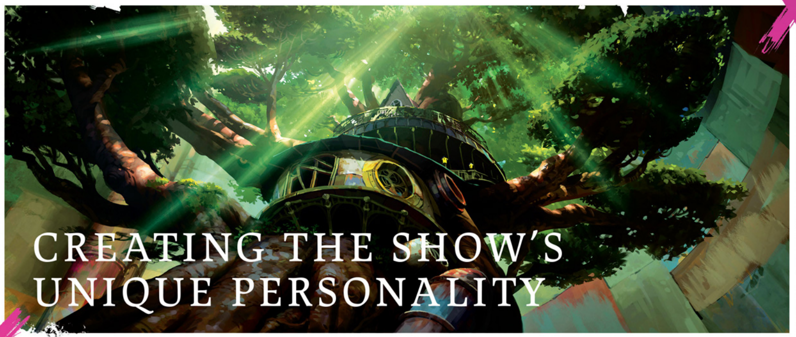
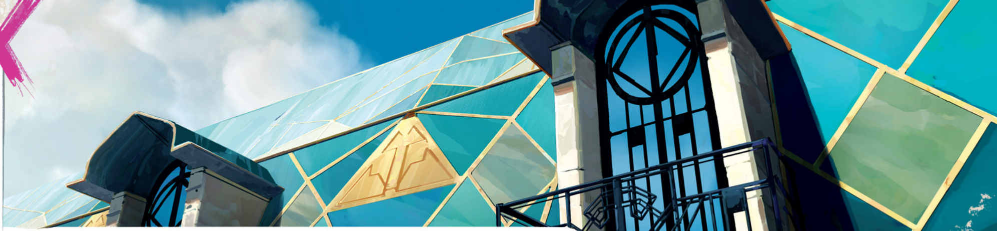
Fortiche artist providing reference for Mel in Episode 208

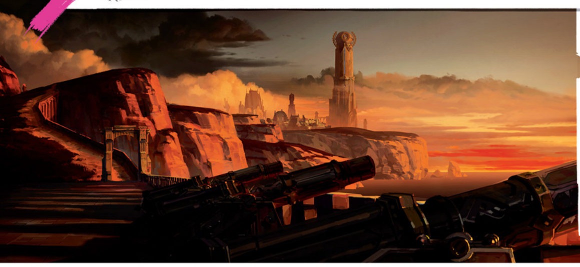
LEFT

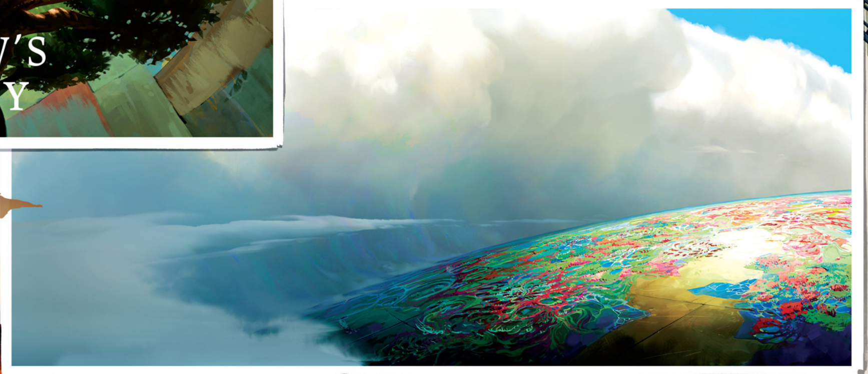
Fortiche artist providing reference for Jinx's battle with Warwick in Episode 204

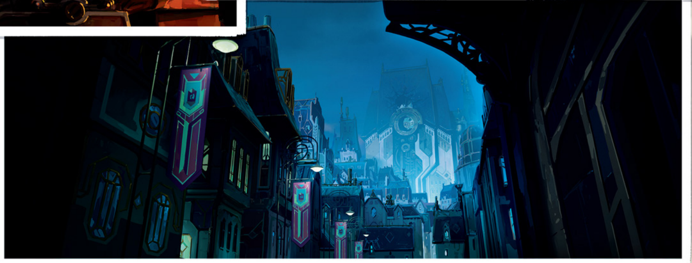


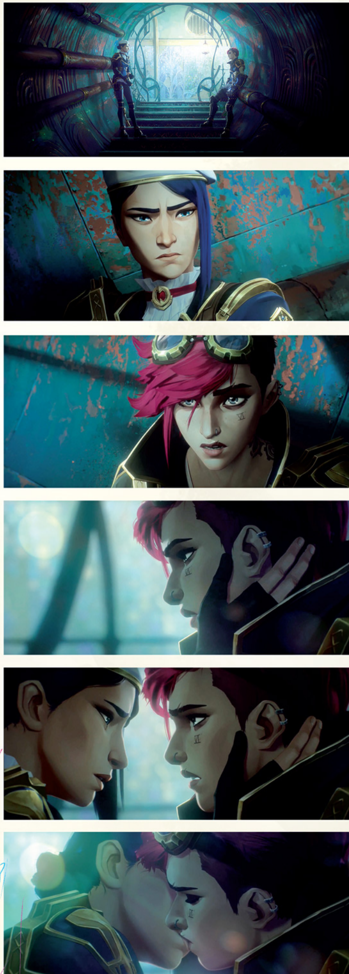
CREATING THE SHOW'S UNIQUE PERSONALITY











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Matte paintings of the Firelights' tree; hexcorized alternate future; vestiges of an old defense system of Piltover; Piltover street leading to the Academy building

CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP

Matte painting of Piltover balcony; stills of Caitlyn and Vi in Episode 203

ARCANE'S UNIQUE STYLE OWES PARTLY TO FORTICHE'S belief in "happy accidents" and "beauty shots." Fortiche created actual beautiful paintings, but also developed characters and action that have live action's feel and naturalness—the combination of two seemingly antithetical elements contributes to the show's distinctive identity.

"I thought what they always did so beautifully, and I think better than anyone else, is to capture the imperfection of human-made things," Christian Linke said. "The way they treated the camera was always different at Fortiche than anywhere else. They spend so much time on the realism of the imperfection of the camera—the movement when someone's following someone with the camera, like if there's dirt on the lens and really making them feel like there's a human being holding the camera. From the beginning, I knew that they had this spirit to really go above and beyond, but also to have this human angle on everything as an artistic expression. Nothing is ever sterile."

Intrinsic to the development of the dual cities was that imperfections were baked in to make the settings more believable. Pascal Charrue pointed out, for example, that "Nothing is really round. When you make a sphere in 3-D, it's a perfect sphere, but when you draw by hand, you never draw a perfect sphere. All the elements that are meant to be perfect are intentionally not perfect, as if they had been drawn by hand. Those imperfections may not be noticeable to the naked eye, but they prevent this kind of cold feeling you can get from the perfection of 3-D. The only perfect objects in *Arcane* are the gemstones because they're meant to be a perfect magical object."

Another way *Arcane* went against the modern action grain was by deliberately slowing down the pace when it came to the editing. Bart Maunoury points out that in Season 1, Fortiche tended to stay away from long takes. "Each one can monopolize an animator for a long time, which could create a workflow problem," he said. "When you create half a second of animation a day, a ten-second shot can take a month. With experience, we were able to commit to longer shots in Season 2—three hundred, four hundred, five hundred frames, and twenty- or thirty-second shots that would take an animator a couple of months."

One of Maunoury's favorite examples of a longer shot that was well worth the effort is the kiss between Vi and Caitlyn in Episode 203: "We have a long take with Vi, who is arguing with Caitlyn and saying she's not doing well. Caitlyn enters the frame, gets closer and kisses her. So we have Vi's monologue, Caitlyn moving in, and the kiss, which in itself is fairly long. That's something that we might have done differently in Season 1. Nowadays, people tend to over-edit movies, but when you have an idea for a good shot, you might as well make it last. Great filmmakers use long takes."

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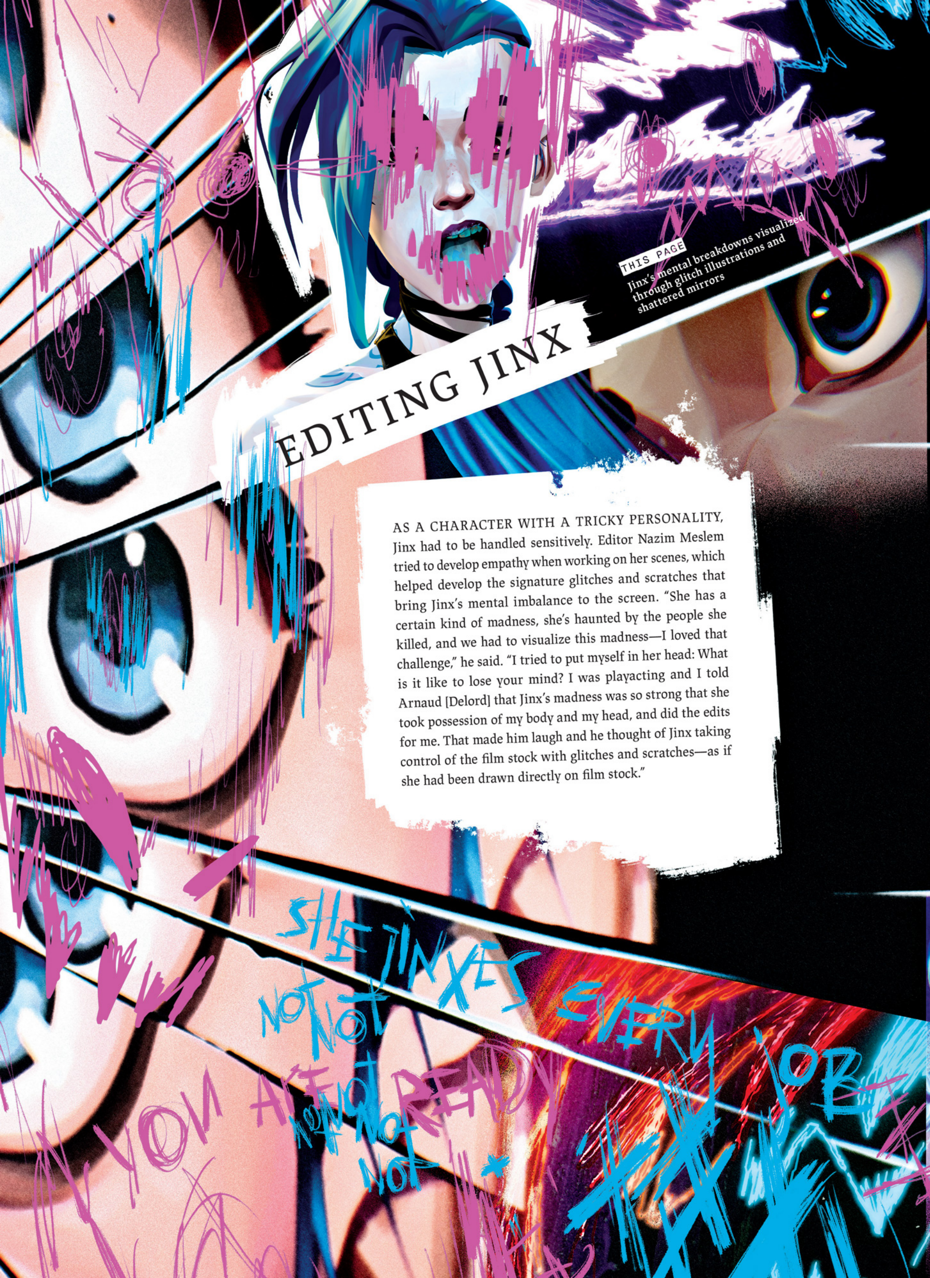

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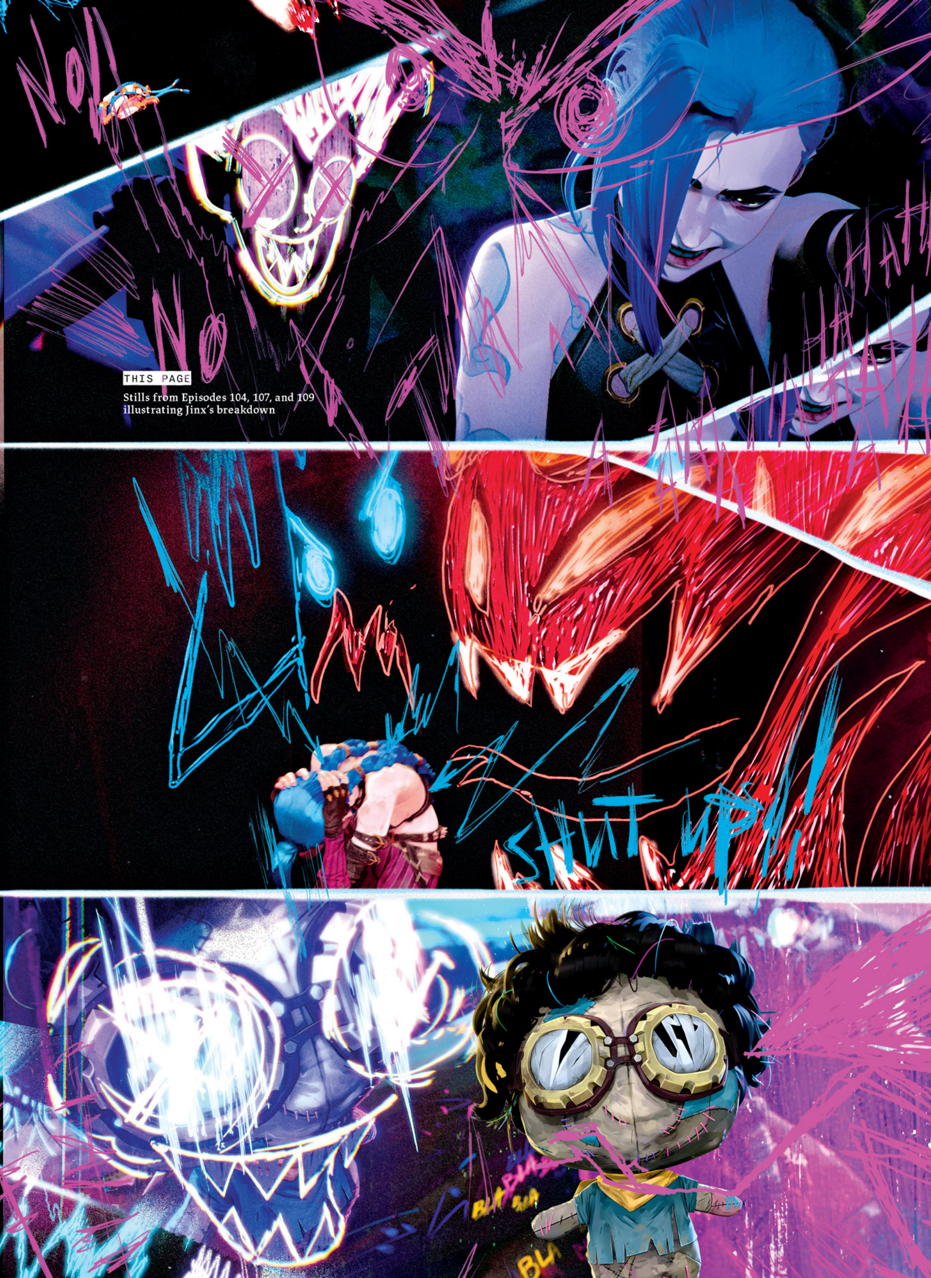
Jinx's mental breakdowns visualized through glitch illustrations and shattered mirrors

EDITING JINX

AS A CHARACTER WITH A TRICKY PERSONALITY, Jinx had to be handled sensitively. Editor Nazim Meslem tried to develop empathy when working on her scenes, which helped develop the signature glitches and scratches that bring Jinx's mental imbalance to the screen. "She has a certain kind of madness, she's haunted by the people she killed, and we had to visualize this madness—I loved that challenge," he said. "I tried to put myself in her head: What is it like to lose your mind? I was playacting and I told Arnaud [Delord] that Jinx's madness was so strong that she took possession of my body and my head, and did the edits for me. That made him laugh and he thought of Jinx taking control of the film stock with glitches and scratches—as if she had been drawn directly on film stock."



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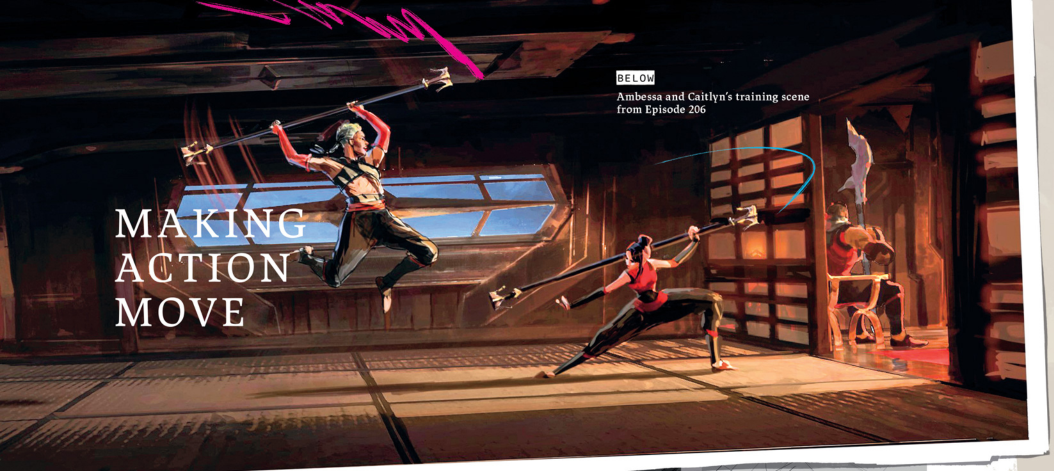
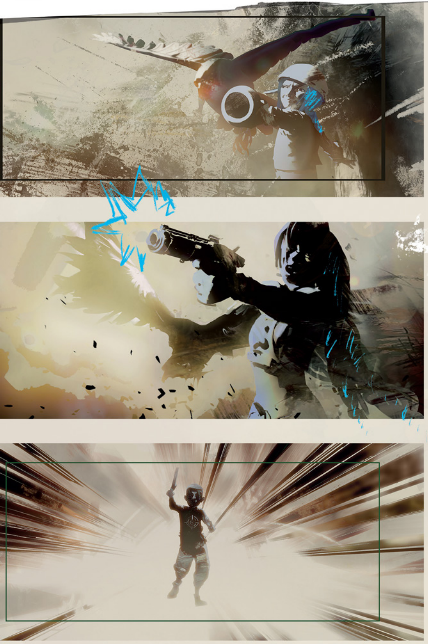
Stills from Episodes 104, 107, and 109 illustrating Jinx's breakdown

MAKING ACTION MOVE



BELOW

Ambessa and Caitlyn's training scene from Episode 206



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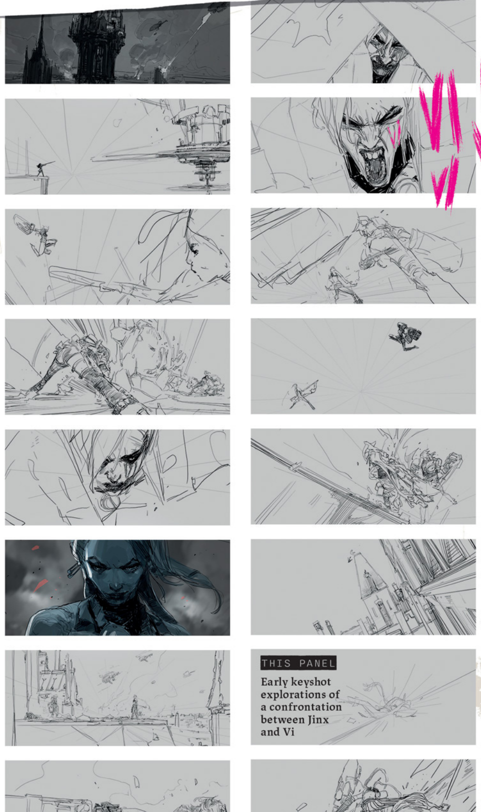
Stills from Episode 107



THIS PANEL

Early keyshot explorations of a confrontation between Jinx and Vi

EPIC BATTLES ARE AN ESSENTIAL COMPONENT of *League of Legends*, and while they are not the be-all and end-all of *Arcane*, the show smoothly integrates them into its storytelling fabric. The fight scenes in *Arcane* are among the most beautifully, kinetically directed and choreographed of any recent screen project. What makes them even more remarkable is that each of those scenes is distinctive from each other.

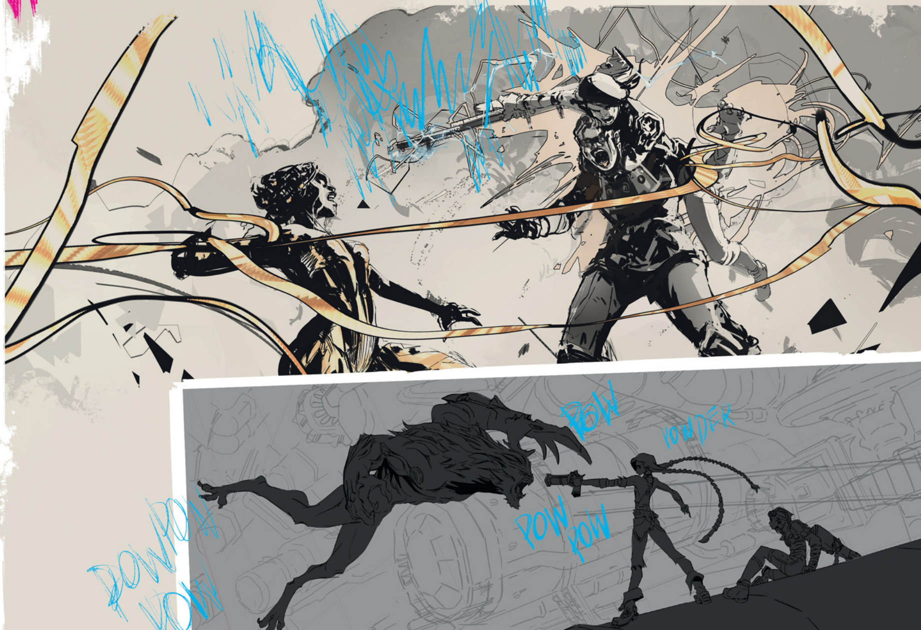
A perfect illustration is Ekko and Jinx's fight in Episode 107. Editor Nazim Meslem was very aware of the need to avoid repetitiveness in the action scenes, and he found unlikely inspiration in the Raymond Queneau book *Exercises in Style*. The book was published in France in 1947, and within its pages, the author tells the same anecdote in ninety-nine different ways. "We could stage a fight like a musical, another with puppets, a funny one—we could do them in completely different registers," Meslem thought to himself. "So when we started brainstorming the big fight in 107, I said 'Isn't this an opportunity to do it as a music video?'" There already was a slightly similar scene at the beginning of the episode, but Arnaud Delord gave the green light. The trick was to have a different approach. "The first video in the episode was all mood, no plot, and we couldn't do that again," Meslem said. "So we thought we'd go back to Jinx and Ekko's childhood and their relationship. One thing just leads to another."

Bart Maunoury, a director on Season 2, stressed that "we tried to give each fight a different flavor. When Vi fights, it's very realistic, the punches are realistic. When Jinx fights, it's less realistic—we have more leeway with the timing and the physics of the action."

Staging battles involving many, many combatants involved different challenges. The series finale includes a large-scale war, which required much preparation. "When we were brainstorming those scenes we re-watched all the great war movies like *Full Metal Jacket*, *Platoon*, *The Thin Red Line*, *Dunkirk*," Maunoury said. And of course, there was *Saving Private Ryan*—"especially for the way it uses a handheld camera that really immerses you in the heart of the action. There are shots where we are with the fighters, who are filmed at shoulder-level—we don't position the camera too high or too low. We want the camera to feel tangible, and that's been a recurring theme since Season 1. Often in animation you position the camera any which way just because you can. We tried to position the camera so you can always imagine that the person operating it is standing behind. Of course, we can do dolly shots, crane shots, things like that, but there is always a rationale for our choice."

BELOW, FROM TOP

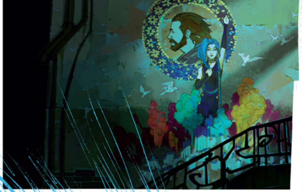
Concept art of Mel and Caitlyn's battle with Ambessa in Episode 209; concept art of Vi and Jinx facing off against Warwick in Episode 209

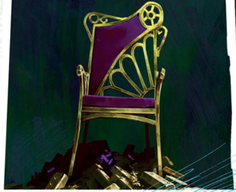


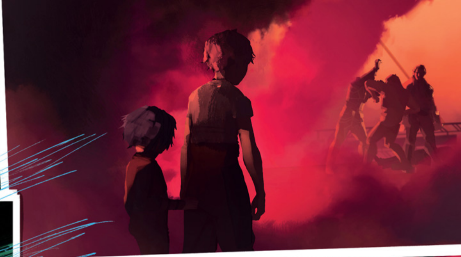
CHANGING TACK

FORTICHE LIKES TO MIX THINGS UP with the visual codes of *Arcane* and then some. Among the most memorable examples is the beginning of Episode 107, which integrates street art and graffiti. The memorial for Caitlyn's mother in Episode 201 uses charcoal drawings, most done by the art director Julien Georgel himself, for the backgrounds, which then contrast with the 3-D characters. Episode 204 features the Blue-haired Girls, the rebels who follow Jinx, so to suggest the punk imagery of countercultural activism, Bart Maunoury drew graffiti that was then repainted over the images.

Part of it was a need to switch things up and keep moving in unpredictable directions, creatively speaking, but you can't underestimate the team's appreciation of semi-improvisation and creative problem-solving—especially when it comes to pushing members to step out of their comfort zone. Anne-Laure To remembers that she had to work on a music montage in Episode 203, something that was not necessarily in her wheelhouse. "It's a fight with the task-force attacking the chem-barons, and it's drawing a bit from American comics, a bit from punk," she said. "You can work on aspects that are aesthetically different from what we usually have in the series. In every music sequence we do something different—there's a scene inspired by genre-movie posters in 202. Sometimes there are unforeseen results when you're working with others: Someone has an idea, you bounce off it, and it's a really pleasant creative process."

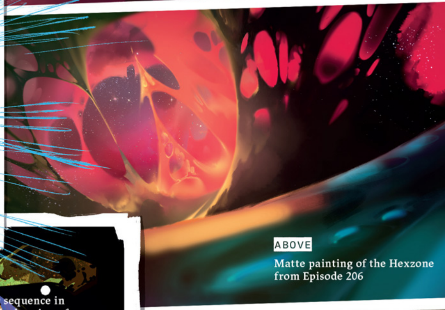






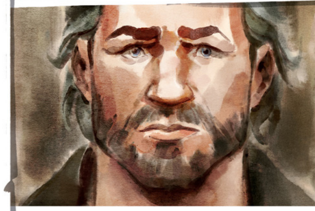
CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT

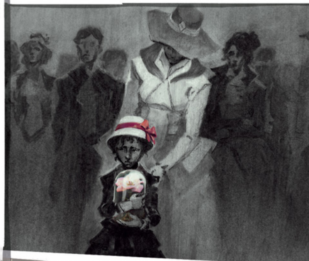
Jinx's mural from Episode 205; Silco's chair from Episode 202; Vi and Powder as children in the intro sequence from Episode 101



ABOVE

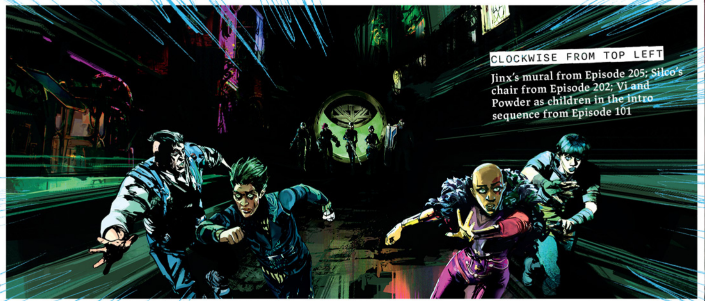
Matte painting of the Hexzone from Episode 206

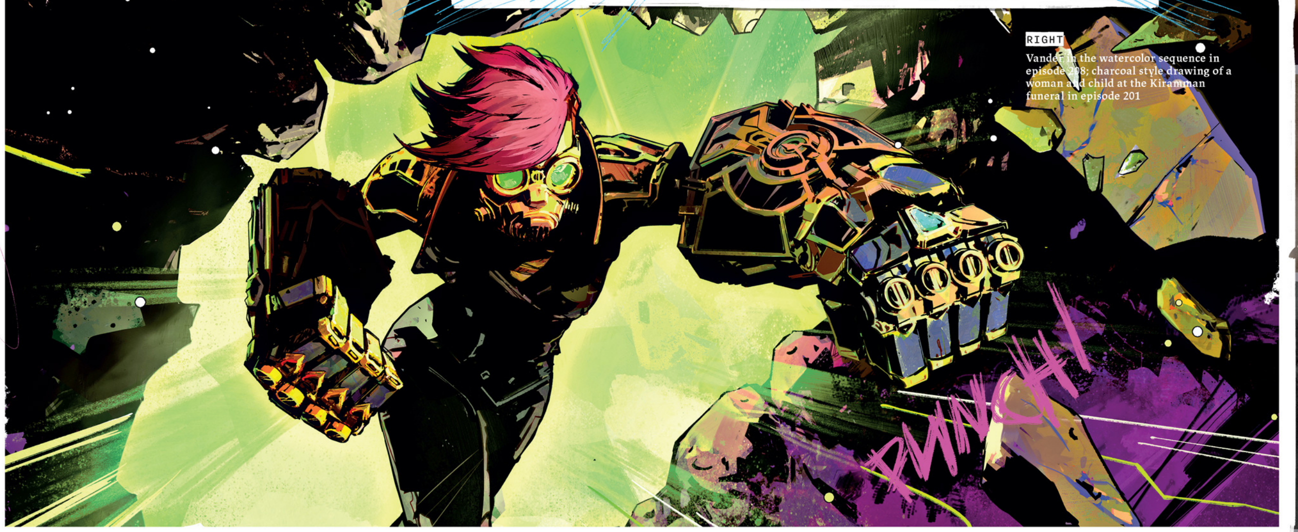


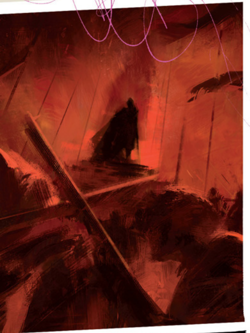


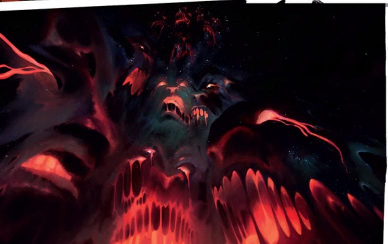
RIGHT

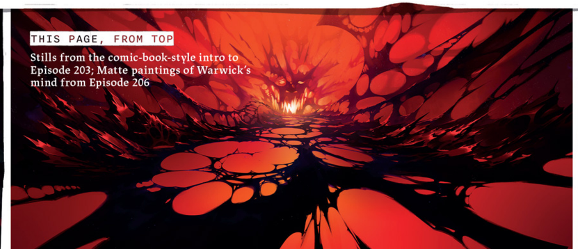
Vander in the watercolor sequence in episode 208; charcoal style drawing of a woman and child at the Kiramman funeral in episode 201

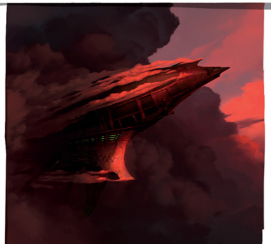












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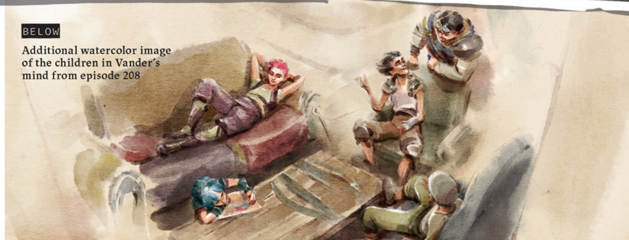
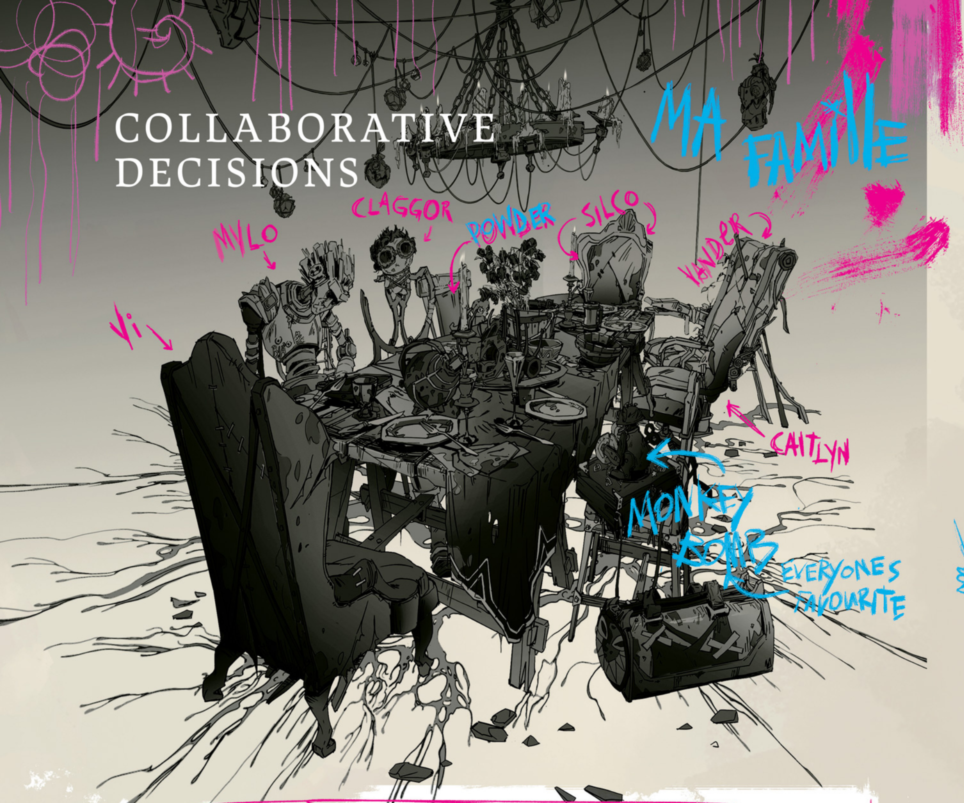
Stills from the comic-book-style intro to Episode 203; Matte paintings of Warwick's mind from Episode 206



BELOW

Additional watercolor image of the children in Vander's mind from episode 208

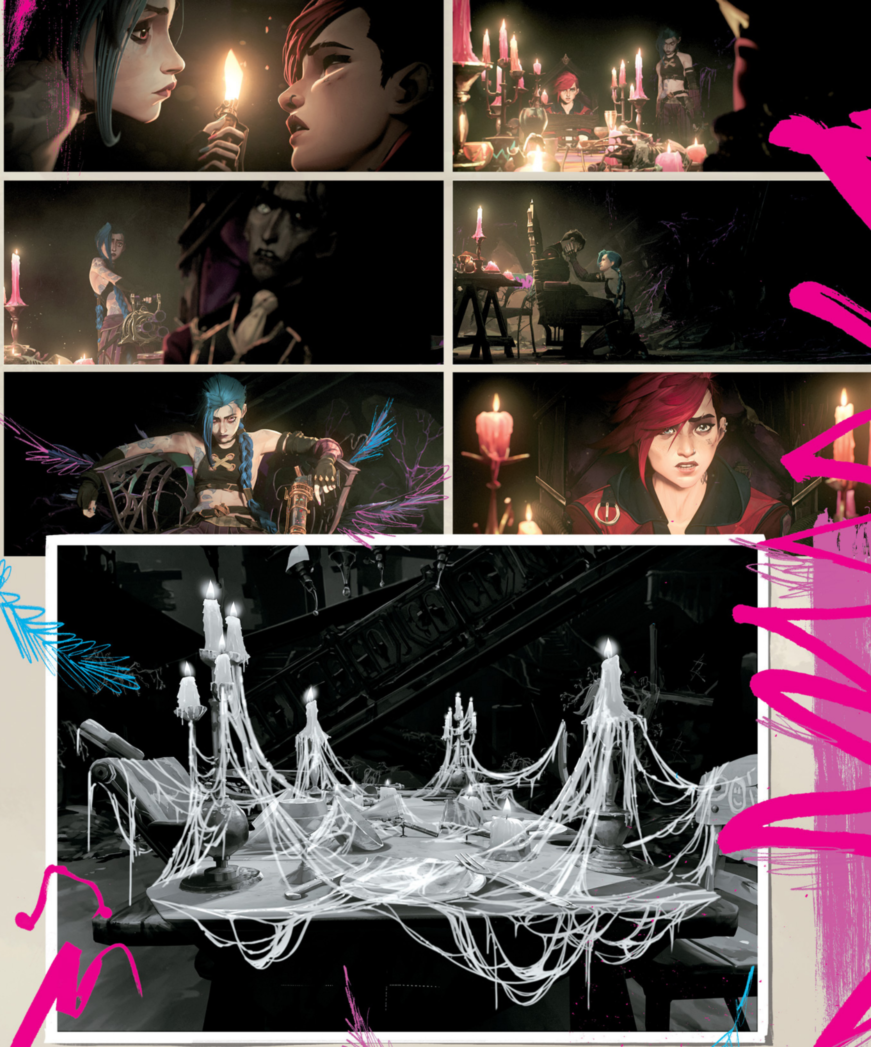
COLLABORATIVE DECISIONS



WHAT MAKES ARCANE SO IDIOSYNCRATICALLY creative—or is that creatively idiosyncratic?—is the trust-based partnership between Riot and Fortiche, which allowed them to be open to each other's suggestions and change direction when something wasn't working. An example members of both teams spontaneously mentioned was the slightly ghoulish dinner party in Episode 109, when Jinx has captured Silco, Vi, and Caitlyn, and the tension between the sisters reaches an apex. Christian Linke and Alex Yee were struggling trying to write that scene, and they were getting frustrated. Julien Georgel recalls that there were several versions of the scene in the planning stage, all rather different from what ended up in the show. "One of them involved a big fight, then there was one more in the middle ground with Jinx who, facetiously, was spinning her propeller blades," Georgel said. "It was getting to be expensive and also more cartoonish than emotional, so Arnaud Delord came up with the idea of a family dinner. It was more intimate, more human, and it felt emotionally rewarding rather than just another brawl."

Linke remembers that the creative dynamic was turned on its head. "Usually my experience is that Fortiche works well with us when they can react to something and they can make it the best version of what it can be," he said, "but this was really us being like, 'Man this is a very loaded, difficult scene.' And so we just said, 'Give us the scene that you can imagine and we will try to write that.'"

"I remember a reference for this dinner-table scene was from *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, which is so totally different," Yee added. "It's a really good example of how you can hear a pitch and struggle with seeing the vision that's in someone's head. Without trust, without that sort of established relationship, I don't know how you could just be, 'Okay, let's go.'"



OPPOSITE PAGE

Concept art of Jinx's dinner table from Episode 109

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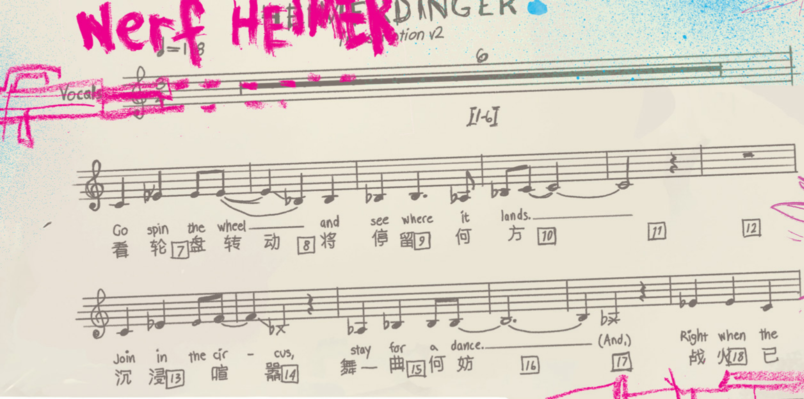
Stills from Jinx's dinner party in Episode 109


Nerf HEIMER
DINGER
otion v2
Vocals
Go spin the wheel and see where it lands.
看轮盘转动将停留何方
Join in the cir - cus, stay for a dance. (And,) Right when the
沉浸喧嚣舞一曲何妨 战火已

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Sheet music for Heimerdinger's theme; orchestral recording sessions in Berlin

ABOVE AND BELOW

Riot Games' composer Alex Temple working on Silco's theme

7

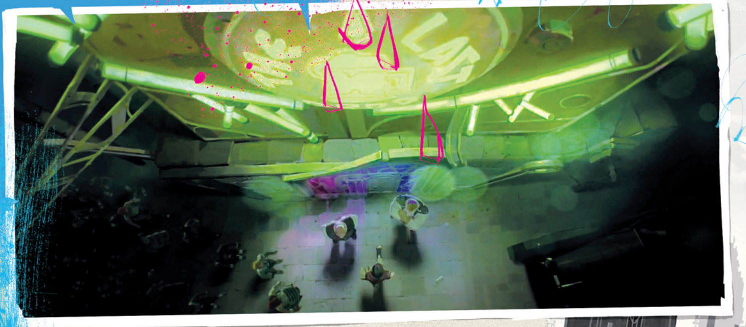
FOLLOWING THE BEATS

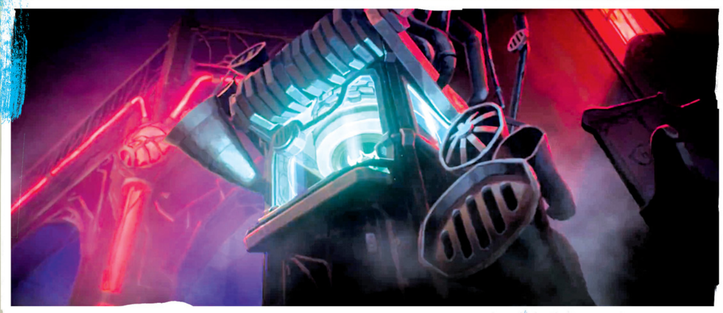
THE BEST WAY TO WATCH *ARCANE* IS WITH HEADPHONES: As propulsively told, painstakingly detailed, and evocatively written as it is, the series is just as innovative and sophisticated from a sonic point of view. The series's visuals always work hand in hand with the voice acting, the sound effects, the score, and the original songs. Experiencing this complex tapestry with a state-of-the-art home sound system is great, of course, but a personal immersion on headphones brings out the details of the *Arcane* aural world.

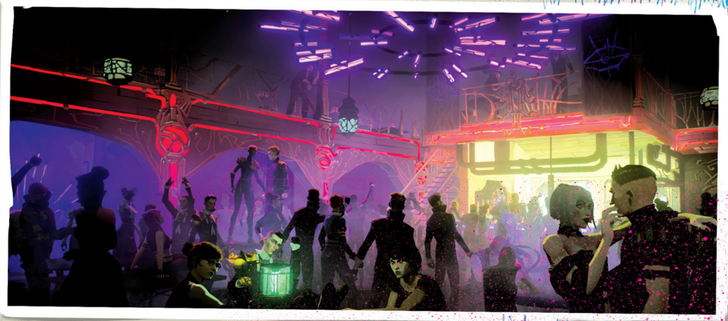
"We do have an in-house composer and an in-house sound team, which is very unusual," said Melinda Dilger, producer at Riot and a veteran of animated movies and series. "I've never seen that before on a series, so that's unusual too. I think it was a great idea on Riot's part because they were like, 'We want to spare no expense on our first launch.' And they didn't."

Christian Linke had already put his background as a musician to good use in the *League of Legends* music department, so he was very hands-on when that area came into play with the series. "What's unique about *Arcane* is that the creative showrunner is also a composer, so he has no shortage of opinions on what the music should or shouldn't be," said Alexander Temple, who had composed music for *League of Legends* before working on the show's score with the songwriter, producer, and musician Alex Seaver, a.k.a. Mako.

Over the two seasons, Temple and Seaver delivered a wildly varied orchestral score that filled in even further the universe of the show. Generally speaking, Temple explained, their approach was: "Piltover is going to be orchestral, and Zaun is going to be industrial. Piltover is going to feel precise; it's going to have moments where it feels uplifting, like we're witnessing scientific progress, and the music should match that. So the music should have intricate patterns and repetitive ostinatos, things like that. Zaun should feel grungy and imprecise, sort of brutal and raw. If we want to use a track that has guitars, it shouldn't just sound like a clean recording of a studio guitar but some sort of organic texture that's been played through a tube distortion, where someone just made this instrument out of scrap materials found in Zaun. Of course, as the show is rarely exclusively in Zaun or exclusively in Piltover, we have all these opportunities to figure out where a particular scene can lie between these two colors."







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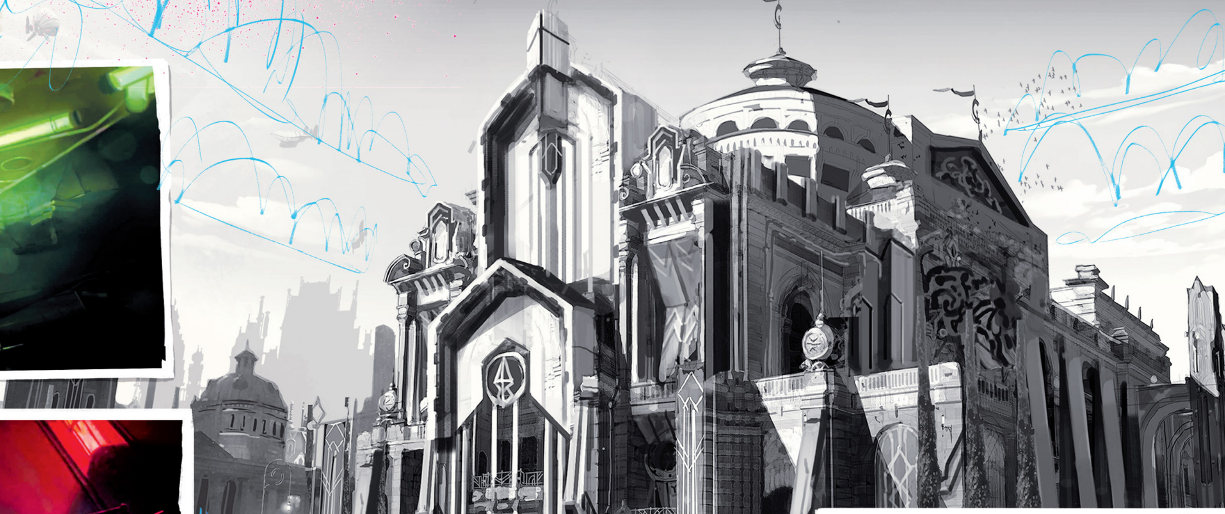
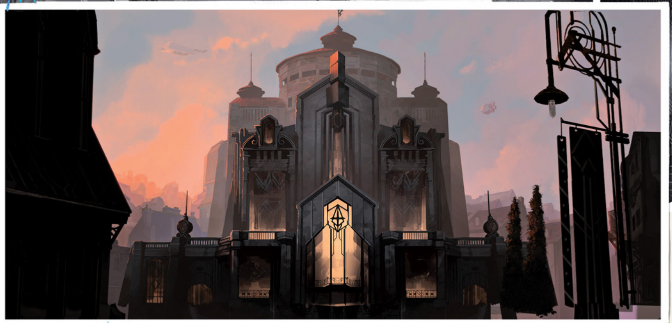
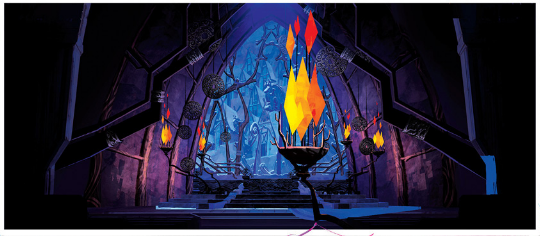
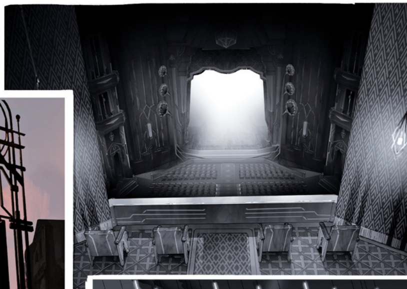
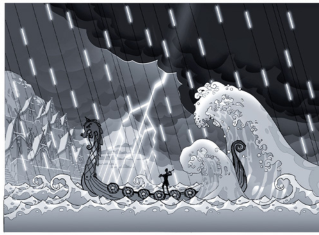
Stills of a party at Silco's renovated Last Drop, from Episode 104











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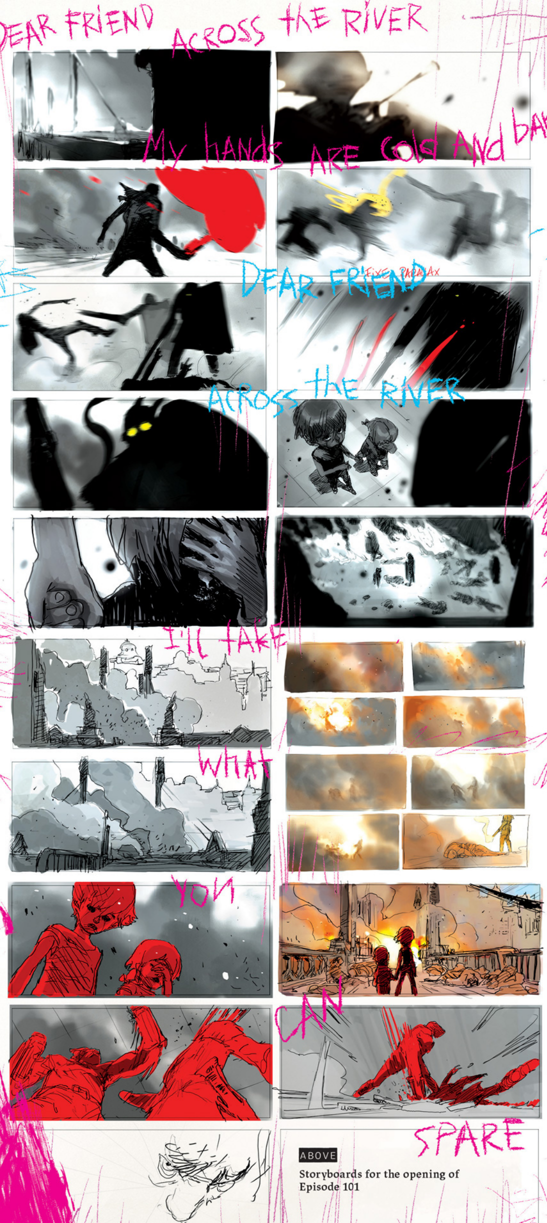
Concept art for the Piltover Opera House and its stage



ABOVE

Storyboards for the opening of Episode 101

A scene in Episode 105 stuck in Temple’s mind as an example of counterintuitive thinking that paid off. “It’s sort of a love scene between Jayce and Mel intercut with Viktor suffering, coughing up blood and whatnot,” he said. He explained that Fortiche had used temporary (“temp”) music in a classic, sweeping Hollywood vein to animate the scene. When the time came to create some original scoring, Temple decided to emulate the temp music’s mood and Linke encouraged him to go for it. “I did my best 1950s, 1960s, Bernard Herrmann, Hitchcock kind of love theme,” Temple said. “And I think it worked really well for that scene. I’m sure there were viewers who were like, ‘You should have used a pop song or something like that,’ but I was really happy with how that turned out. I thought it was being earnest, and it didn’t feel like it was being a caricature of that kind of scene.”

If the score has a signature instrument, it might well be the violin, played by the popular virtuoso Ray Chen—a music consultant for Riot and the model for the violinist seen in Episode 105. The instrument is a key element in the score to some scenes, like the beginning of Episode 101, for example, and in some characters’ themes. Temple wrote a suite for Powder “that was meant to sound sweet and innocent and childlike, and at the same time, it had a quirkiness and a playfulness to it, with little wrong notes here and there,” he said. “It was also rhythmically related to the ‘Get Jinxed’ song. We would ask Ray at certain points just to have super-rude musical outbursts, where he’s playing very sweetly and all of a sudden it’s almost shocking in terms of how aggressive the playing gets.”

Temple also used Powder as an example to explain how melodic motifs and orchestrations can suggest or underline changes in a character’s moods and even their psychology. “With Powder, we had that song from the beginning of Season 1 when she’s singing to her friend across the river,” he said. “In the scene in Episode 7 when we see Jinx strolling through after this huge battle, she’s humming the melody to herself in a very carefree way but the score behind it is playing a totally different key playing incredibly loud dissonant chords.

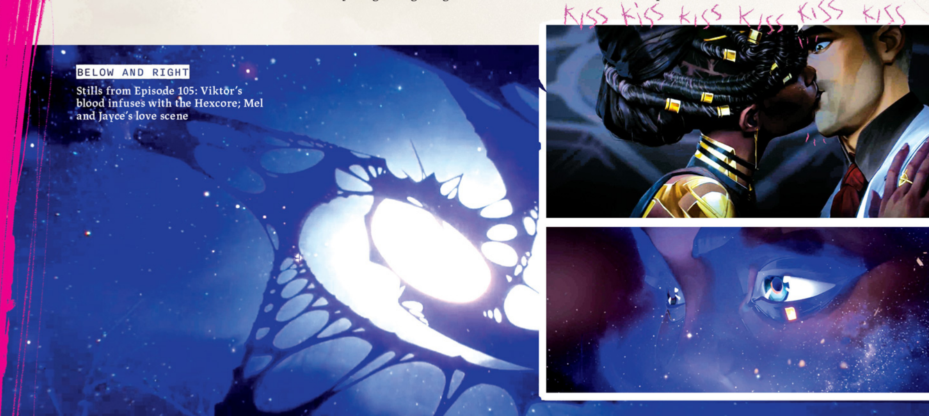
But of course, it’s impossible to talk about *Arcane* without talking about its use of songs—original ones, mind you, not repurposed existing tracks. Christian Linke is particularly proud of the lineup of guest artists that has created material for the show.

The general approach was tricky because the show is set in a fantasy world, so the creative team had to carefully negotiate how it would integrate modern-sounding songs. “We don’t want to feel like stuff is too modern or too futuristic for the world of *Arcane*,” Temple said. “I think this is sometimes where it gets challenging because if you want something to feel like a pop song that actual people in the real world want to listen to now, you’re going to have to produce it in a way that uses modern production techniques. At the same time, if you’ve used that in-world, you operate in a certain amount of suspension of disbelief where it’s like, ‘Maybe they wouldn’t have an 808 kick in Zaun but that’s sort of an accepted sound.’ But there are not that many instances where the song is actually being played in-world. We’ve certainly been helped by the fact that more franchises are doing that now. The modern classic example that people use is *A Knight’s Tale*, where it’s fourteenth-century knights fighting, but the people watching the jousting are singing ‘We Will Rock You’ by Queen. Feeling authentic to the story is priority number one. It doesn’t have to explicitly be like, ‘Oh, this fits because the instruments sound like they could be from Piltover or from Zaun.’ It’s more: ‘Does the emotion fit? Does that fit the spirit of the scene, even if the instruments are sort of a big stretch from what would be believable?’”

Composer Sebastien Najand, who works at Riot, remembers the olden days when Linke—who almost single-handedly comprised the company’s nascent music team—hired him and Alex Temple to work on music for *League of Legends*. “We built that relationship so when it came to *Arcane*, it was similar to working on any other projects,” he said. “He knows how we write, our styles of music, and we know how to take his feedback. He can be very detailed on the music-production side of things. There was a moment on Episode 107, for ‘Dynasties & Dystopia,’ I made the first demo of the instrumental. Christian heard it and said ‘Oh, actually, I have an idea, try this there.’ He was sending me snare sounds—that’s something you can’t really do with a lot of people. Christian works on it and thinks about it and gives you ideas. Not only is he able to dive deep into the production process of the music, but he has the full picture.”

ABOVE

Violinist Ray Chen (left) and composer Sebastien Najand (right)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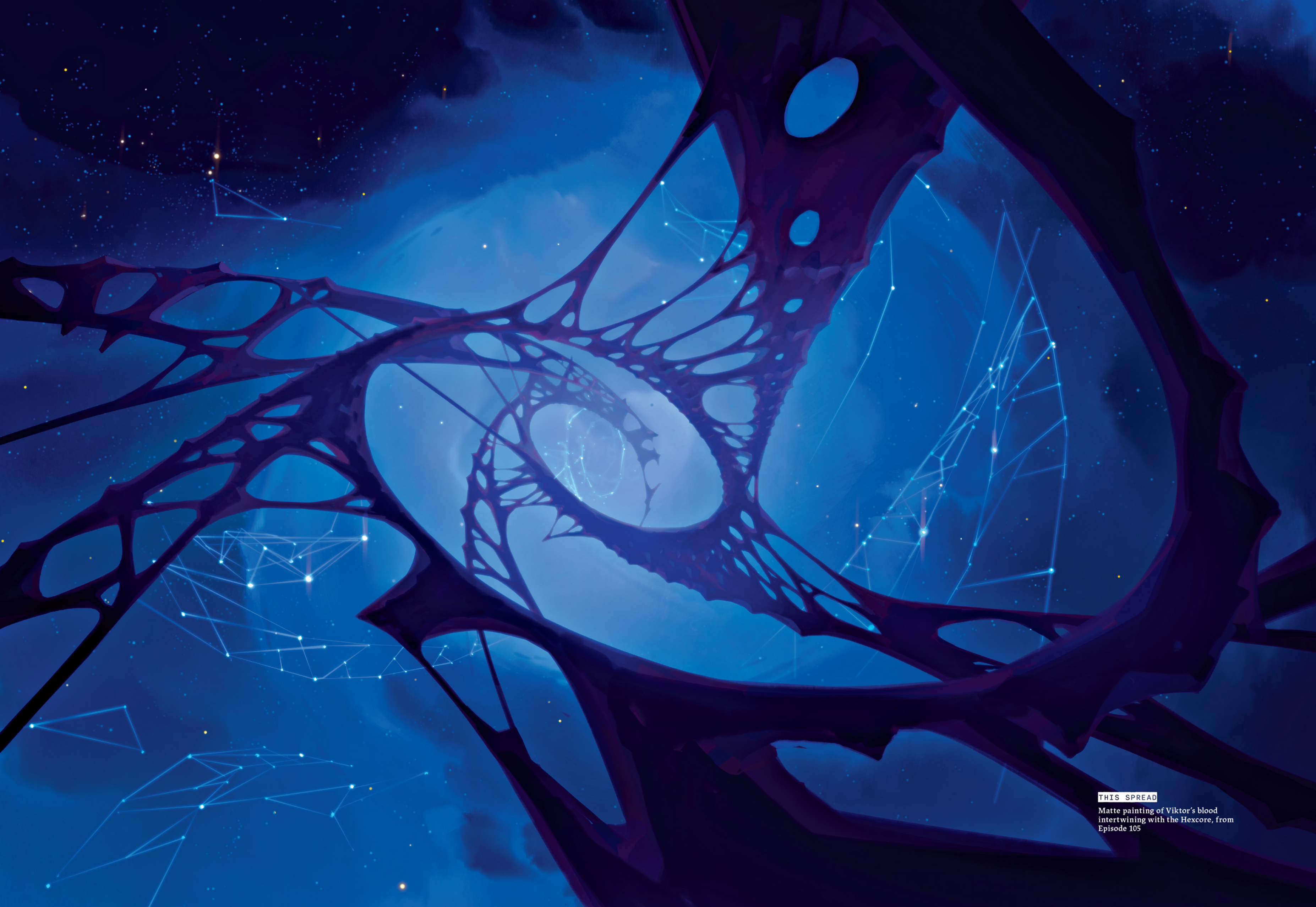
BELOW AND RIGHT

Stills from Episode 105: Viktor’s blood infuses with the Hexcore; Mel and Jayce’s love scene



THIS SPREAD

Matte painting of Viktor's blood intertwining with the Hexcore, from Episode 105

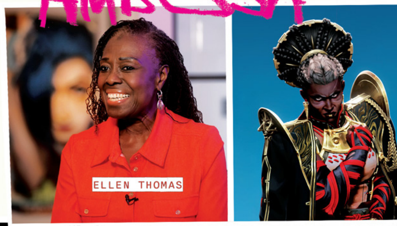
QUIET!!!
QUIET • RECORDING AREA
RECORDING!

VOICE ACTORS

THIS SPREAD
Some of the voice actors for the English- and Chinese-language versions of *Arcane*

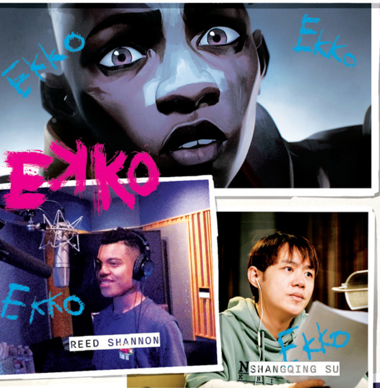
WE HAVE AN ETHOS
YES YES OF COURSE
MEL
TOKS OLAGUNDOYE
QIAN WAN

BRETT TUCKER
doctor
SINGED
doctor
doctor



HAOJIA LI
HEIMERDINGER
MICK WINGERT

Man, What a Loooong Name PROFESSOR!



Cheer up, Leftie
SEVIKA
AMIRAH VANN

WHEN IT CAME TO VOICE TALENT, THE *ARCANE* ACTORS were chosen because they could, first and foremost, bring their characters to life. The most recognizable name in the English-language cast—on which the animation was based—may be Hailee Steinfeld, who plays Vi. Steinfeld's breakthrough came when she was thirteen and co-starred with Jeff Bridges in the Coen brothers's Western *True Grit*. Since then she has had a thriving singing and acting career, which includes more animated genre fare (she plays Gwen Stacy/Spider-Gwen in the *Spider-Verse* films, for example).

She and the British actress Ella Purnell, who voices Jinx, are ideally matched as screen sisters. Getting there was not easy: Christian Linke recalls that it took two years to cast Jinx. "We went through everybody we could get our hands on in the U.S., then we looked everywhere in the world," he said. "Eventually we found Ella, which was just like the pearly gates opened."

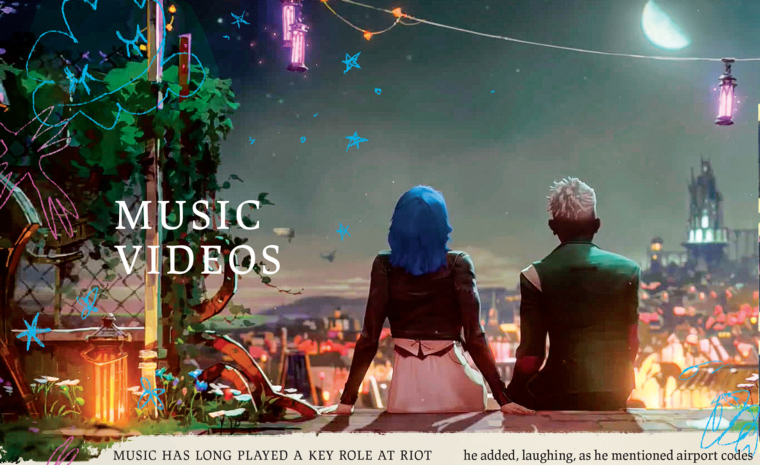
The powerhouse performances have combined to make *Arcane* one of the best acting ensembles in animated projects in recent memory. And those performances were often integral to the development of the characters: Just like editing comes early in the animation process (as opposed to live action, where ideally editing takes place once footage has been shot), acting impacts design and even storytelling. An extreme example is Grayson, who is the former sheriff of Piltover and Caitlyn's mentor. "We had the voice before we had a design," Pascal Charrue said of that character. "We were inspired by the actress Shohreh Aghdashloo, who has this gravelly voice. She also often plays powerful women, so we decided to keep her for the character's look."

Most of the time, the animation department had access to videos of the actors's recording sessions, which proved invaluable in making sure the show's characters looked and behaved in relatable manners—especially since the camera often zeroes in on intimate closeups that magnify every emotion floating across a character's face.

Being able to watch the actors as they put down their vocal tracks in the studio proved particularly helpful in bringing Jinx to life. Purnell faced a singularly daunting task as her character's flamboyance and extroversion hid deep fault lines. Jinx's fractured personality, which also harbors the innocent Powder, essentially means that Purnell played two people nested within one another. "When you watch Ella Purnell record Jinx, she looks like she has an electric personality," animation supervisor Martial André said. "She's always moving, she gesticulates, she goes in and out of character, then she starts whistling, then she stops, then she takes a swig from her water bottle, then she dances a bit. 'Another take, another take'—and she goes right back in character. She does a lot of interesting little things like that, which perfectly match Jinx's personality: There's trauma but there's also more lighthearted times. It was a source of inspiration." Purnell's performance was so impressive that she won the 2021 Annie Award for Outstanding Achievement for Voice Acting in an Animated Television/Broadcast Production, specifically for the Season 1 episode "When These Walls Come Tumbling Down."

Generally speaking, visuals of the recording sessions helped the Fortiche animation team refine facial expressions. "With Remy Hii, who played Marcus in Season 1, there were times when we could emulate what he was doing," André said. "Even his expressions worked with the character."

VANDER
J.B. BLANC
CONG LIU



MUSIC VIDEOS

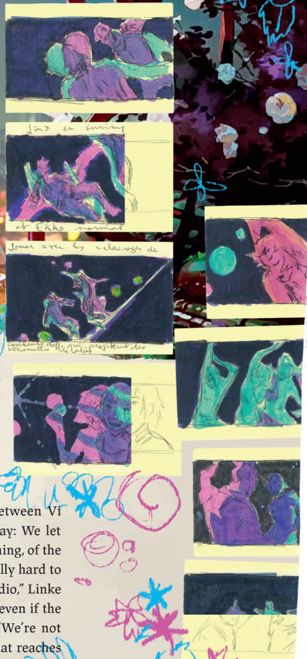
Music has long played a key role at Riot and in *League of Legends*. The company has a rich history of making music videos to accompany the launch of some champions, and even created virtual bands like the heavy-metal Pentakill and the K-pop combo K/DA. Add Linke's experience as a musician, and it followed that the score and songs would play a big role in *Arcane*—so much so that the series developed a tradition of self-contained sequences that are internally referred to as "music videos." Nazim Meslem, who is part of the editing team at Fortiche, explained that a music video is "a musical scene over a song with a distinctive graphic treatment. You're both in the series and slightly outside of it. Those scenes also elicit a special pleasure because they feel new. It was about creating a breath of fresh air."

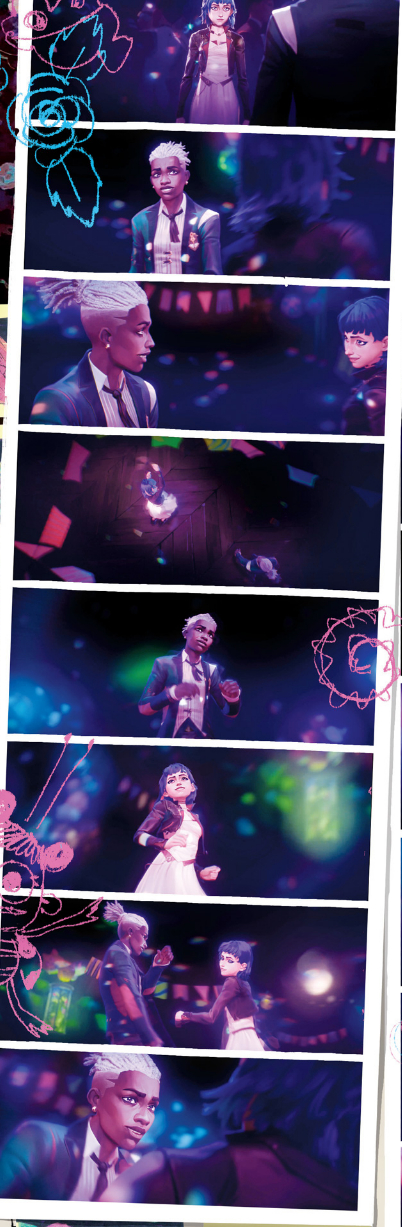
This was a natural move for Fortiche. "We come from music videos, so we've always told stories that way," co-founder Pascal Charrue said. "It was a fairly late decision to basically have a music video in each episode. We would use temp music when editing. I think it's at the beginning of Episode 107, when we have Ekko and the Firelights. Ekko came back to fetch Powder and realized she had lost her mind, and he brought a Firelight with him. Originally there were five sequences and at one point we thought it'd be more efficient to introduce the Firelights via a music video. We created one and it became a recurring occurrence. Thanks to Riot's weight, we were able to get Sting on Episode 109, and other similar artists who could graft themselves onto our temp scores. In Season 2, it was really a goal to have a music video in every episode. Some journalists thought this had been imposed by Riot, but not at all."

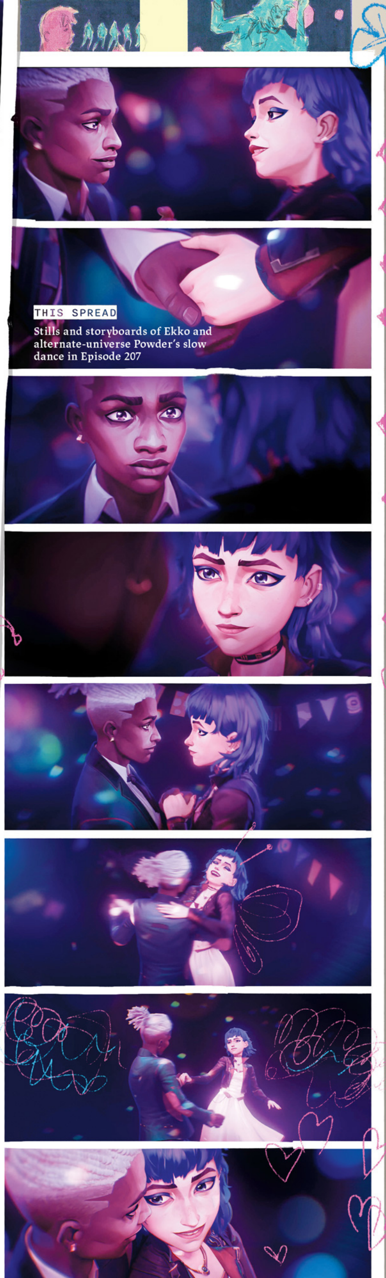
A classic Fortiche music video is Ekko and Powder's heartbreaking slow dance in Episode 207's alternate timeline. "The issue was what song we'd use," Meslem said. "We had a temp track that worked perfectly over the animatic so we sent it to LAX, which is what we call Los Angeles here—I don't know if they call us CDG," he added, laughing, as he mentioned airport codes for L.A. and Paris. "We moved on to Stromae and LAX brought in a demo from Stromae with a bit of a Caribbean flavor, which was completely unexpected. And that's cool—I love going against the grain." The song ended up as a duet between Stromae and the popular French singer Pomme.

A big get for Linke was King Princess, who wrote the song playing over the love scene between Vi and Caitlyn in Episode 208. "Let's put it that way: We let the French roam free," the showrunner said, laughing, of the steamy encounter. "In Season 1, it was really, really hard to get any artist because we were unproven as a studio," Linke said. "Animated series tend to be low budget, so even if the artists were interested, the labels always said, 'We're not going to give a big song to an animated series that reaches only a few people.' The artists that we got in Season 1 only happened because they pushed it through. Season 2 was a very different ballgame," he added with no little satisfaction, "We had big artists who wanted to be part of *Arcane*. Generally speaking, whenever we reached out to an artist on Season 2, we at least had their ear."

Tailoring songs for the show was tough, but worth the effort: "What's special to me about the *Arcane* music is that the songs feel like they're clicking with the lyrics for the moments of the characters," Linke said. "But it can be a slog getting there. A lot of artists will not be okay with you telling them what they need to do. We ask people to write to this timing and these lyrics and everything—it's a nightmare. You can only really work with certain artists who are willing to go there with you. It's been a blessing and a curse, but it's basically about briefing the artists and giving enough context, but also giving enough space. Stromae did something really, really cool that works on the lyrics in a really powerful way," he continued. "I'm hoping that this can be really a moment of pride for the French community, and the people at Fortiche. It's literally a love letter to French culture."







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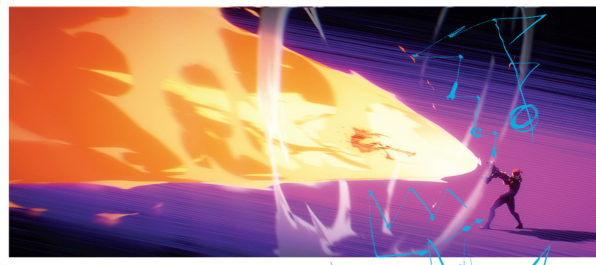
Stills and storyboards of Ekko and alternate-universe Powder's slow dance in Episode 207

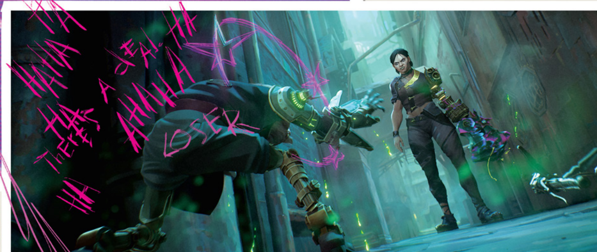
HITTING THE RIGHT TEMPO

THE SCORING TEAM WAS OFTEN PLAYING catchup on Season 1, and composer Sebastien Najand recalls that they often had to problem-solve to make things fit a scene. "With Season 2 we started to work much earlier, which can create a better marriage of music," he said. "But at the same time, sometimes we started a year and a half or two years before and things change, so we'd have to change the song again and again."

"Sometimes one of the sequences of the scene was getting shortened or elongated and then we had to think like, 'What do we do? Do we shorten the verse or do we add a longer transition between the verse and the chorus or something like that?'" Najand continued. "We also try to keep the song at a steady tempo, but there's a few cases where we had to make the song more of a variable tempo—you can't really tell that it's changing tempos, but it makes everything work."

To illustrate the point, Najand picked the fan-favorite, over-the-top fight scene involving Jinx, Sevika, and Chem-baron Smeech in Episode 202. "The song was not quite working in some places, and I wasn't sure what I was going to do to fix it. Then Fortiche made an edit on their own without the song, and it fixed the song—it allowed me to make changes or it made the changes that I needed to do, and it actually worked better."





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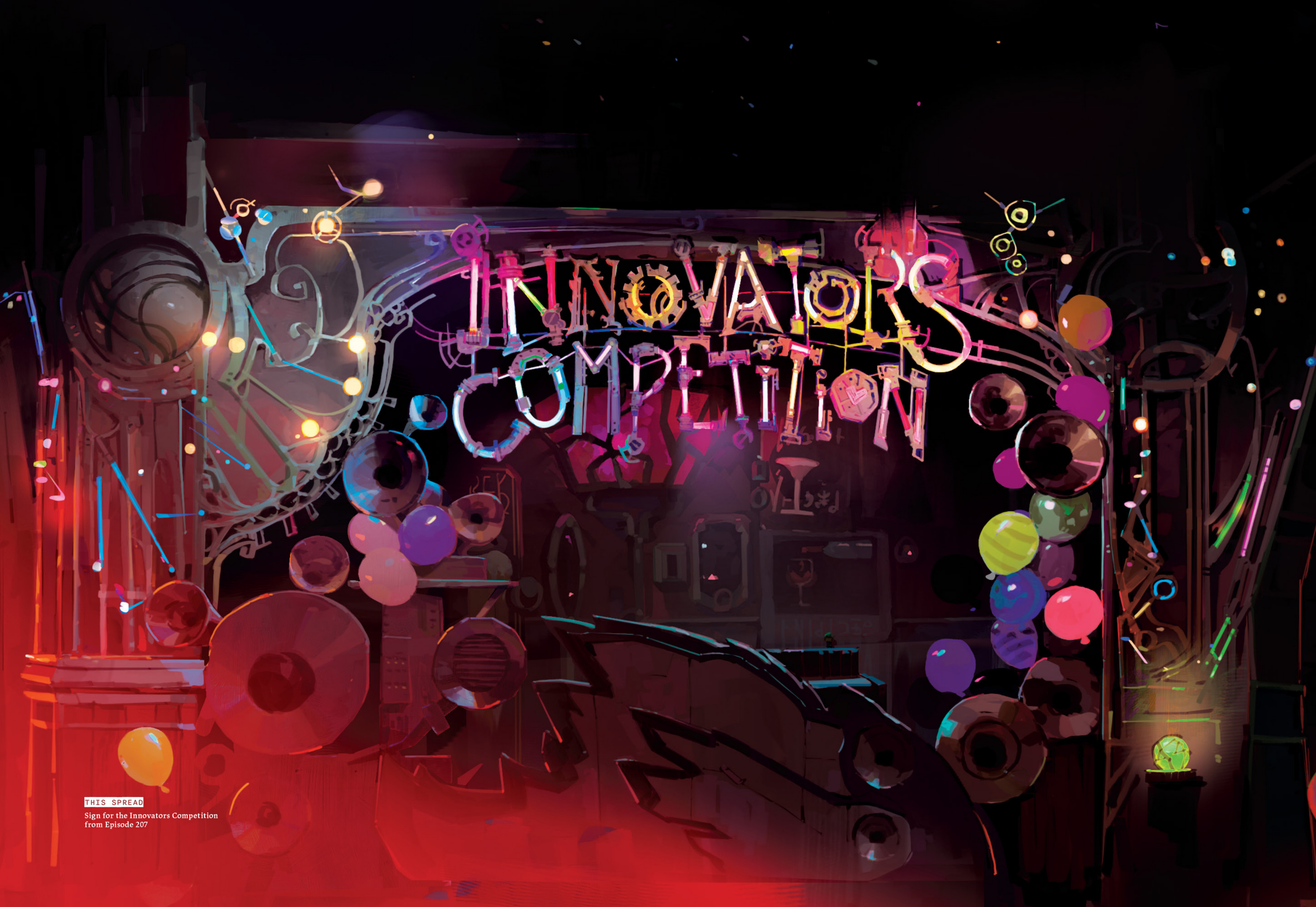
Stills from Sevika and Smeech's fight in Episode 202


INNOVATORS
COMPETITION

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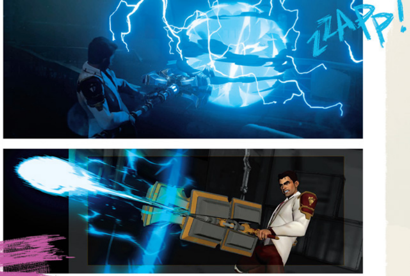
Sign for the Innovators Competition from Episode 207



CREATING A SONIC TAPESTRY

AS VISUALLY RICH AS *ARCANE* IS, ITS SONIC WORLD is just as dense. Just as Fortiche's animators did, Riot's sound team worked on maintaining continuity with the *League of Legends* universe—which is a challenge since a show's demands are much different from that of a game. Eliot Connors, a principal sound designer at Riot who was co-supervising sound editor and sound designer on *Arcane*, took one small example to illustrate the amount of problem-solving that needed to be done over the course of the two seasons. "In Episode 104, we're on that ship and Jinx has this grenade called Chomper," he said. "In the game when she throws that, it makes a kind of a signature sound of basically the mouth closing. But it's, like, four frames long in the game and then it loops. We had to figure out how to attach it to the linear version of her—it's taking that element and making a library out of it in a way where you can use it, say, five times in a row and it doesn't sound repetitive. Jayce's Mercury Hammer is another thing. In episode 108, Vi and Jayce have a battle on the bridge. He fires up that thing for the first time, and we made sure that it had a sound from the game that people would recognize. And they did," he added with satisfaction.

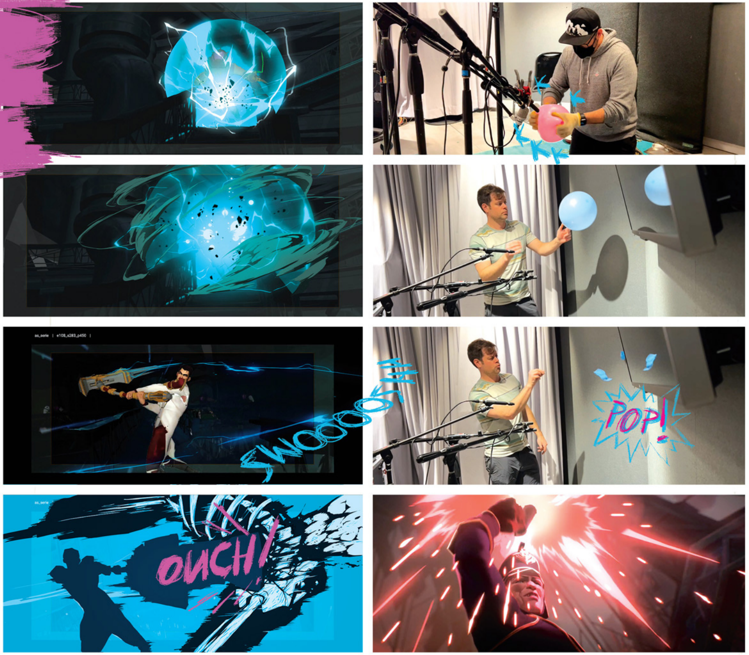
Just like Alexander Temple associated music cues with some characters, the sound designers created little sonic clues. "People can close their eyes and hear Powder walking because they can hear those little canisters clicking," said Brad Beaumont, Connors's sound-designing colleague. "I hear Vi walking because I hear the weird little buckle thing that she's got. I hear Claggor walking because he's got this shoulder leather creak. It's thinking in those terms, but also not wanting to be intrusive and paint every little corner of the show with sound for the sake of it. It's supporting the story and helping people feel connected and immersed."

"That's where the concept art portfolio comes in really big because you can look at those characters and what they're wearing," Connors added. "You can also look at how they're designing the scene as far as the location and what surface the characters are walking on. Because if you walk on metal compared to concrete compared to wood, it all sounds different."

And then there is the sound of no sound. Season 2 starts with the smoldering aftermath of Jinx having destroyed the Piltover's council chamber. Because of the explosion's noise, the characters present in the room have been temporarily deafened and we, the viewers, experience that dimmed reality just like they do. "At the core of that opening were underwater recordings that I did with a hydrophone, which is a waterproof microphone that you can dip down," Connors said. "They use that to record dolphins and whales, but I did a bunch of test recordings in my pool. So that opening is underwater movement pitched down."

The two sound designers are always on the lookout for elements to add to their library—Beaumont said he always carries a small portable recorder in his backpack, just in case. "I could be in a mall and there's a weird escalator, and I look like a weirdo in the mall recording this squeak on an escalator," he said. "We were constantly capturing stuff like that."

In the end, beyond the ingenuity and professional techniques lies the same feeling that drove everybody on the show: experience and dedication. "I've been playing *League of Legends* since the beta of the game, and I'm fully immersed in it," Beaumont said. "The two of us have been working on different elements of the game for a long time. It's all made by people who have helped develop the I.P. over the years and really show a lot of passion for it."


SWOOOOSH
POP!
OUCH!

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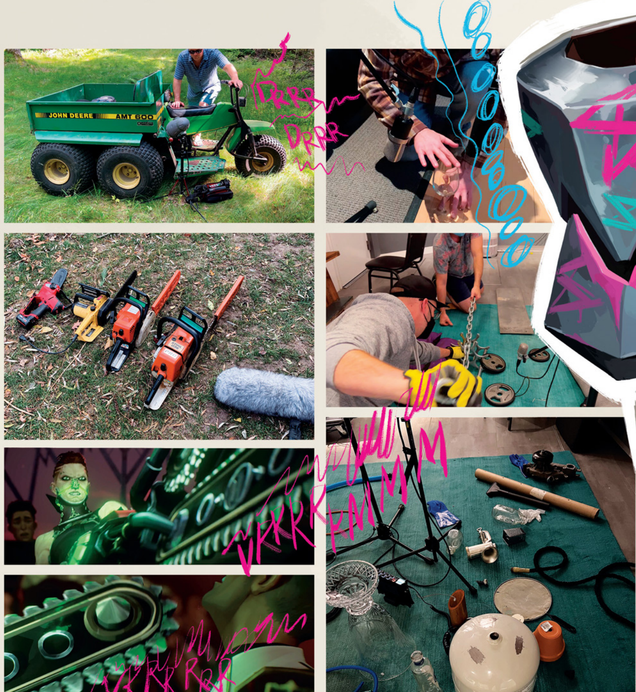
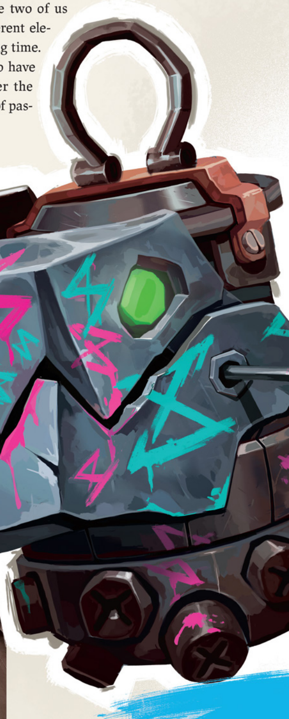
Foley used to create strong SFX; stills and compositing from Episode 108; funeral scene from Episode 201





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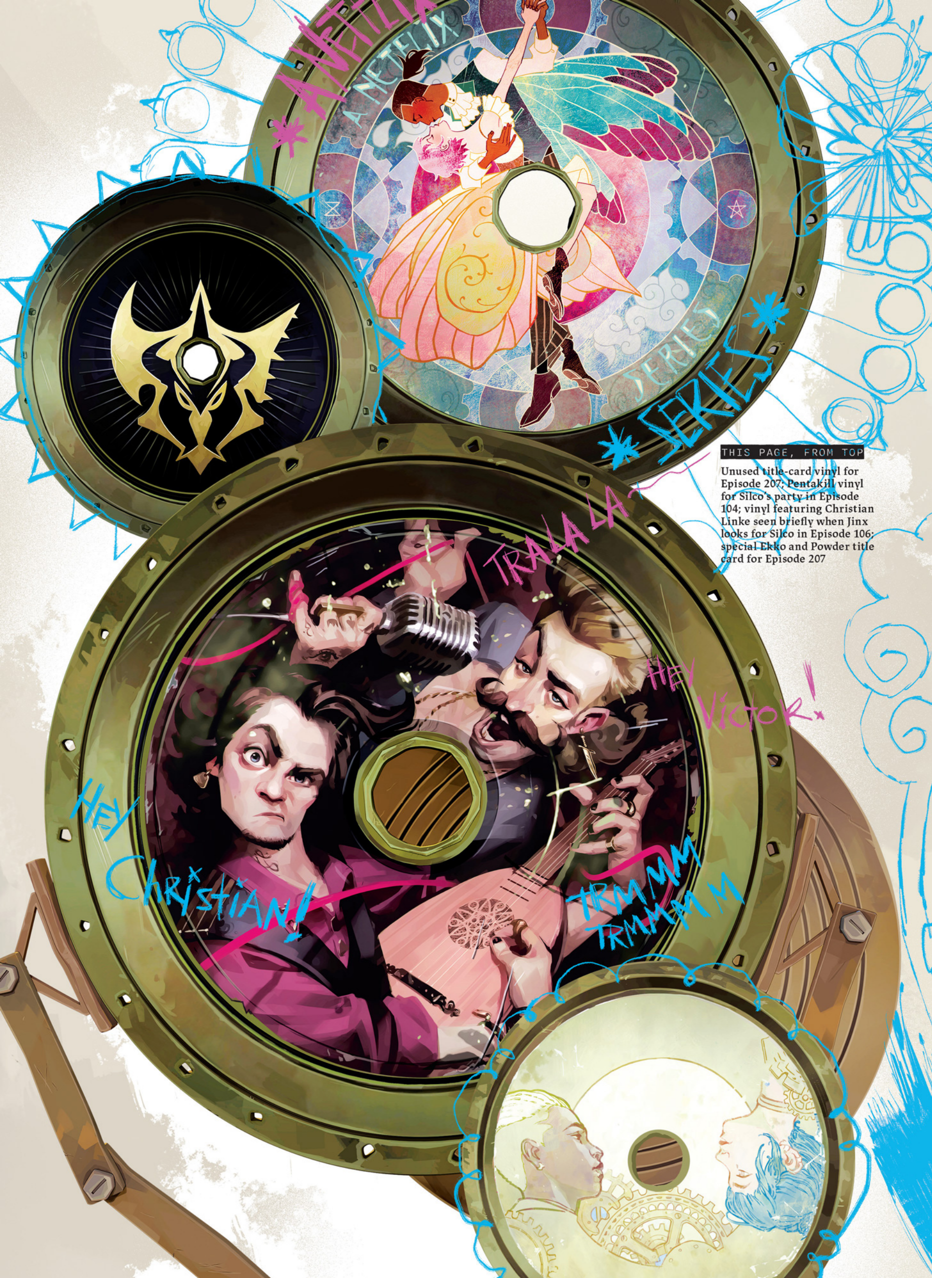
Foley used for Renni's chainsaw and Jinx's Chomper Grenades


A NETFLIX
SERIES
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TRALALA
HEY VICTOR!
HEY CHRISTIAN!
TRMMMM
TRMMMM

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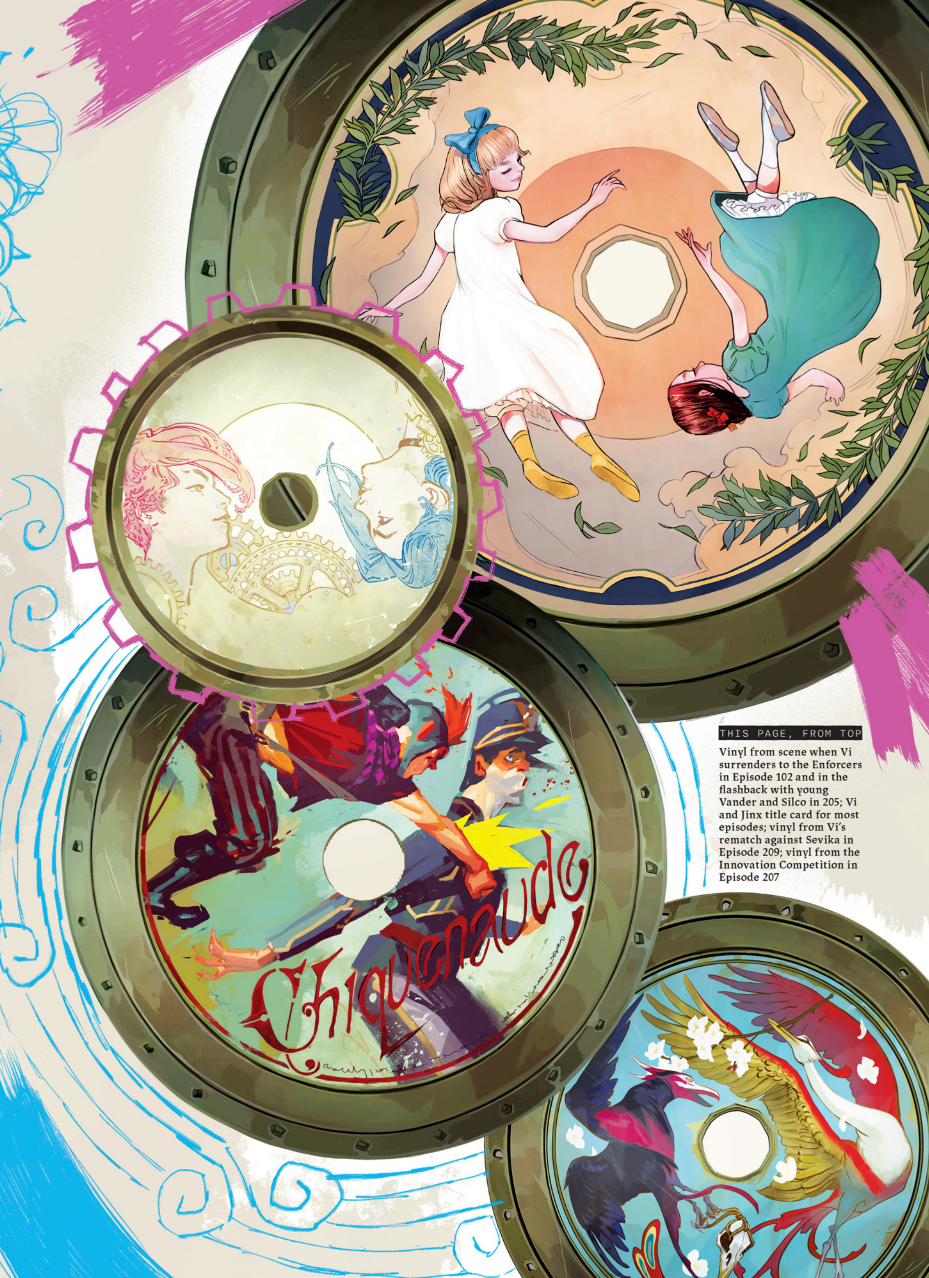
Unused title-card vinyl for Episode 207; Pentakill vinyl for Silco's party in Episode 104; vinyl featuring Christian Linke seen briefly when Jinx looks for Silco in Episode 106; special Ekko and Powder title card for Episode 207


Chiquenaude

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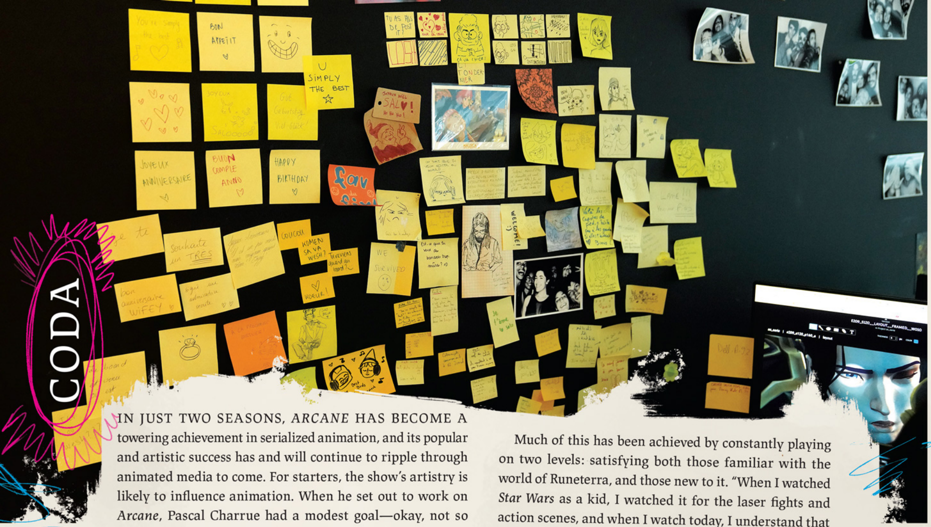
Vinyl from scene when Vi surrenders to the Enforcers in Episode 102 and in the flashback with young Vander and Silco in 205; Vi and Jinx title card for most episodes; vinyl from Vi's rematch against Sevika in Episode 209; vinyl from the Innovation Competition in Episode 207



CODA

IN JUST TWO SEASONS, *ARCANE* HAS BECOME A towering achievement in serialized animation, and its popular and artistic success has and will continue to ripple through animated media to come. For starters, the show's artistry is likely to influence animation. When he set out to work on *Arcane*, Pascal Charrue had a modest goal—okay, not so modest, but that's how artistic ambition works. "My hope was to create something that would change animation," he said. "A series like *Cowboy Bebop* changed the field: Everybody who works in animation knows it, and I hoped we could match that. I think we did even better since people who don't usually watch animation know *Arcane*. My brother and I share the same taste in movies. When I told him 'I'm working on a show that you should watch, you're going to like it,' he would say, 'You know, I don't like cartoons.' When *Arcane* came out, he said, 'You got me—it's not a cartoon.'"

Arcane's success was achieved through teamwork across time zones and cultural differences, with every unit lifting the next. "I think the beauty of *Arcane* on the macro level, for me, is that the scripts are always the worst part of the show," the writer Amanda Overton said. "As a writer, you work so hard to craft a script and make it a beautiful, complex, amazingly well-written story. Then you can say, 'This is the worst part of the show because everybody else was able to add something to that script to make it better at every step of the process.' The directors came in with their own ideas that made the story more cohesive over both seasons; the storyboard artists came in and found angles on each scene that just made it more of what you wanted; character designers, the art direction, every single person on this project made the show better. I love it as a writer when my words are the worst part of the process."

Arcane also illustrates a kind of platonic ideal of a creative relationship between a game and its serialized adaptation: the show expanded on the worldbuilding established by *League of Legends*, and it has also enriched fans' connection not just with the game but with each other. What is remarkable is that *Arcane* has expanded and adapted the world of *League of Legends* while remaining true to its essence. The result is building up to a coherent vision of a single immersive world across the game and the series.

Much of this has been achieved by constantly playing on two levels: satisfying both those familiar with the world of Runeterra, and those new to it. "When I watched *Star Wars* as a kid, I watched it for the laser fights and action scenes, and when I watch today, I understand that behind [that] there are political intrigues," Fortiche's managing director Hervé Dupont said. "It's the same thing here. For *Arcane*, there's an interpretation for the general public that is extremely accessible. The fans can see all the context that's been solidly constructed. It succeeded in recreating this very dense universe that the fans know in a series that is actually accessible to all. Fortiche's aim was to make a story that resonated with everyone."

That is the seismic impact of the symbiosis between *League of Legends* and *Arcane*: two platforms that complete each other into a coherent whole but can also be enjoyed separately. Many viewers of the show don't play the game, which is a testament to each medium's individual strength.

When talking about *Arcane*, Fortiche animation supervisor Martial André still sounds a little disbelieving about the scope of the achievement, and what Riot and Fortiche pulled off—especially since the French company was so small when it embarked on the project. "I think it's a unique experience to live through the birth of a studio," he said. "When I started at Fortiche, I was sold when Bart [Maunoury] told me 'Look, you have great offers, they're big movies, you can polish your animation skills. But what we're attempting has never been done before. Maybe we'll crash, maybe we'll succeed in creating something unique. Do you want to be a part of it?' It's really rare in my business to be at the right place at the right time, with a project that spurs you and where you can tell yourself 'I have something to contribute.' Often you work on animation that looks great but is poor from a narrative standpoint. As an artist you find yourself thinking, 'I poured myself into something that ends up being a little . . . Nutella.' Whereas being a part of *Arcane*, you think 'Yeah, I worked my butt off and it paid off.'"

ABOVE

Congratulatory notes at the Fortiche office

JINX WAS HERE!

FORTICHE

FÉLICITATIONS

LEFT

Fortiche directors Arnaud Delord, Pascal Charrue, and Jérôme Combe; Combe, Christian Linke, Alex Yee, and Delord at the 2022 Emmy Awards

BELOW, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP RIGHT

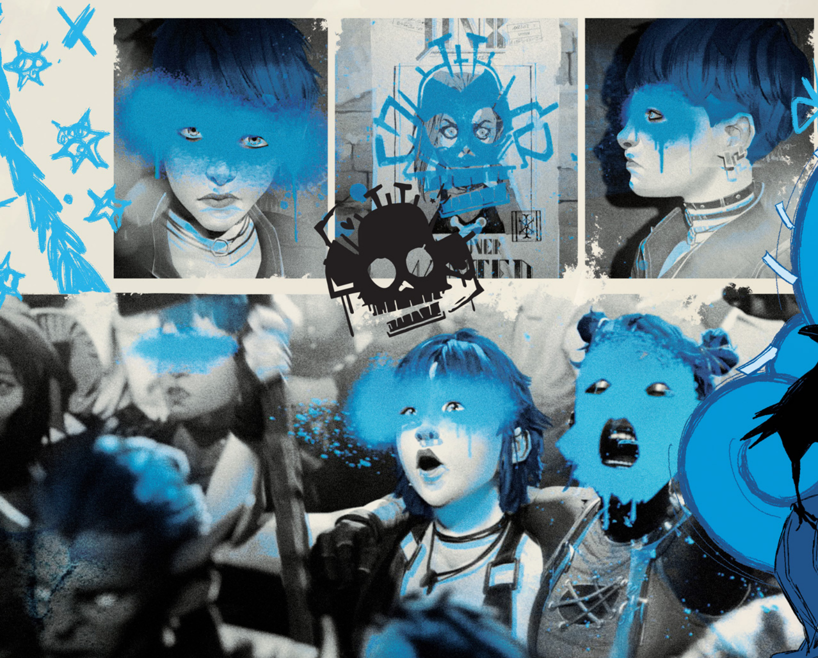
The Fortiche team; members of the Fortiche team at the Emmys; knitted Jinx doll

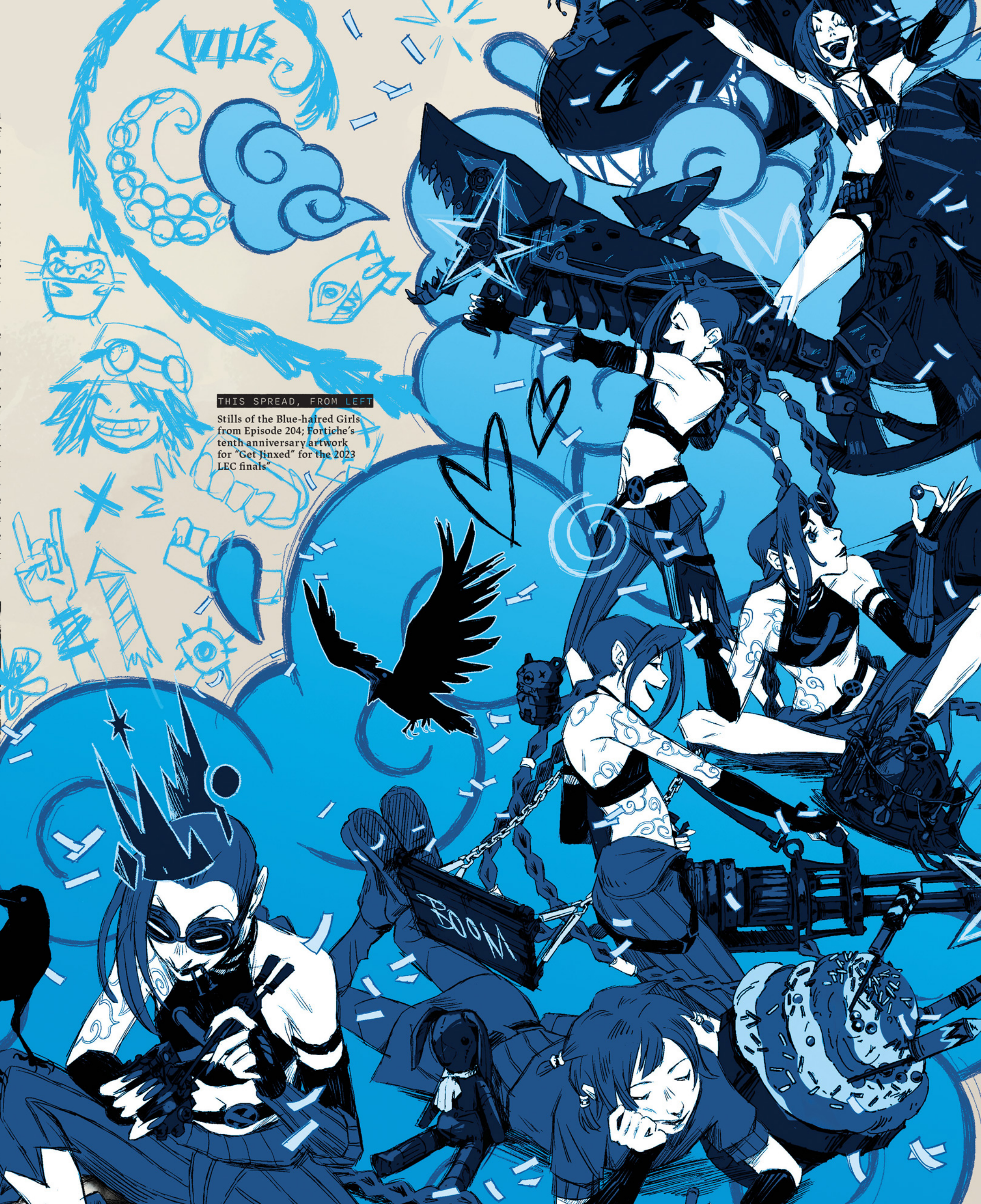
"That was literally the goal: to just do this for the players," producer Melinda Dilger said. "We're not expecting anything back. We love you guys, as a company, and we want to show you how much. So we're going to take these characters that you care about in *League of Legends* and we're going to give them a story, we're going to give them life, and we're going to give them a soul."

The fans took that love and returned it. Like many popular pop-culture phenomena, *Arcane* has sparked the imagination of its viewers, who have celebrated the show with global revelry and active forum discussions, fan fiction and fan art, and, of course, cosplay. Illustrating the feedback loop Riot and Fortiche have created, the show even integrated a form of fandom into *Arcane* itself with the Blue-haired Girls who become Jinx's followers in Season 2.

While many on the Riot side had witnessed fans' passion and commitment firsthand, that level of engagement was new to many at Fortiche. "I'd never experienced that in my career, and it's super-pleasant," Bart Maunoury said. "To see our work analyzed to that extent, you realized it wasn't all in vain. Working in animation often means getting granular, down to an image, down to a pixel. Sometimes it becomes obsessive, you wonder if you're not nitpicking. But some of the fan videos on YouTube can be really spot-on in their analysis of what we do. Well," he observed, laughing, "sometimes they're not, but sometimes they are. Some people detect tiny nuances in acting, in color, in framing. It's really exciting. There's a sort of mutual respect: We don't cut corners and talk down to viewers, and they respond in kind by taking our work seriously. I'm not really a gamer so that's not what drew me to *Arcane*, but with time I gained a great respect for that community, for its passion and enthusiasm. Without doing pure fan service, we try to respect the game and the characters. I want to make series and movies that bring people together. We've always wanted to make a show that stands on its own, with real drama and characters you care about. An entertaining story."

The book you're now holding in your hands is a tribute to both *Arcane* itself and to the people who brought it to life—and honoring the global team that worked tirelessly across time zones and cultures was very important for Linke and Yee. "With this book, we hoped to capture our love and wonder of working with all the amazing talent and artists of the show, and how they do the impossible—making something beautiful out of something that just didn't exist before," they said. "We talk a lot about ideas, but an idea is just a schematic—art is bringing life to those ideas. If the reason you're looking at this book is because you love art, appreciate and love it more. We hope *Arcane* is another way to help everyone appreciate artistry at many different levels and from all perspectives."





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Stills of the Blue-haired Girls from Episode 204; Fortiche's tenth anniversary artwork for "Get Jinxed" for the 2023 LEC finals

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Special Support Thanks: Paula Allen, Jonny Altepeter, Frederick Chen, Jazmin Cooper, Bob DeBelina, Hervé Dupont, Grace Dustin, Wenbin Fan, Siege Gary, Lindsay Honig, Ivory Jones, Spencer Kaplan, Michael Ketchum, Alex Lee, Ashley Maidy, Kiahna Manker, Kerianne Pinkstaff, Christine Ponzevera, Jessica Rovins, Alex Shamiri, Cindy Tang, Nicolas Trout, David Wong, Shauna Wynne
Cover Art and Design: Ayşe Aktaş, Fortiche

INSIGHT EDITIONS

Published by Insight Editions, San Rafael, California, in 2024.
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MELCHER MEDIA

Produced by Melcher Media
124 West 13th Street
New York, NY 10011
www.melcher.com

Founder, CEO: Charles Melcher
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Melcher Media gratefully acknowledges the following for their contributions: Tanya Ross-Hughes and Sarah Scheffel.

Written by Elisabeth Vincentelli
Interior Design Support by Paul Kepple and Alex Bruce at Headcase Design
Headcasedesign.com
Additional Design Support by Chika Azuma
Photos of Fortiche offices on pages 172, 173, 174, 175, 180, 186, 187, 218, and 219 by Emmanuel Guimier

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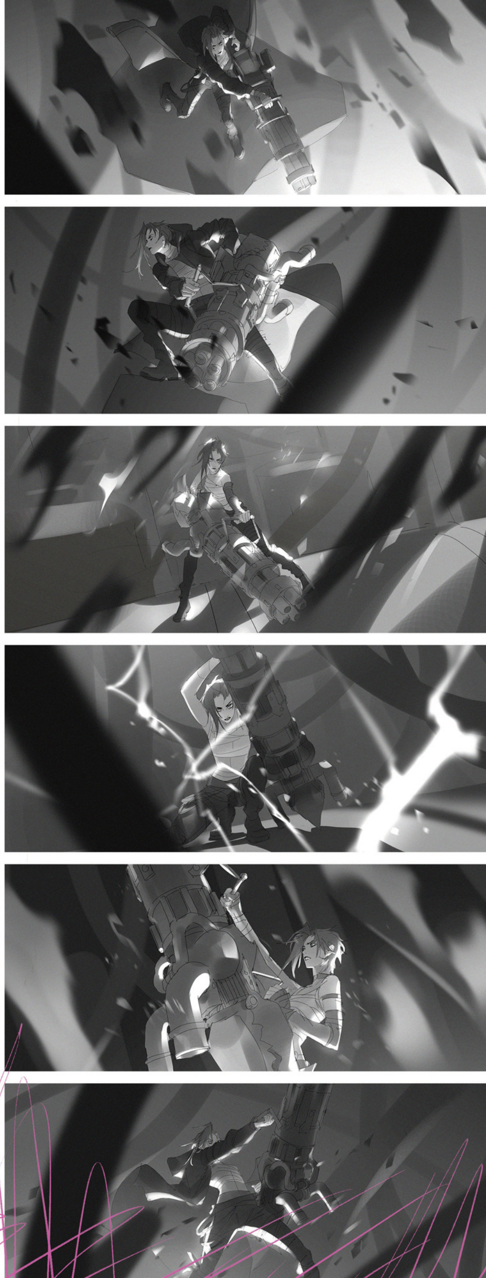
First Edition: November 2024

Trade ISBN: 979-8-88663-335-1
Ebook ISBN: 979-8-88663-336-8
Artifact Edition: 979-8-88663-701-4
Portfolio Edition: 979-8-88663-725-0



Arcane S1 Ep 109 “THE MONSTER YOU CREATED” 07-22-2021

ROCKET MONTAGE

A SERIES OF SHOTS, all accompanied the most serene music:

— The rocket curves. It sizzles with HEXTECH ENERGY ——

— Mel removes her crest ring and places it in front of her.

MEL

I support Councilor Talis’
proposal for peace.

— Sevika crumpled and broken, lights a cigarette.

— Shoola raises her hand in support as well.

— Heimerdinger and Ekko sit together, talking.

— Bolbok raises his hand in support as well.

— Singed in his lab.

— Hoskel raises his hand in support as well.

— Ambessa, pondering what her next move will be ——

— Salo raises his hand in support as well.

— Caitlyn and Vi standing and holding each other, watching the rocket’s trail. Caitlyn silently screams, knowing what’s about the happen.

— Mrs. Kiramman raises her hand in support as well.

— Jayce just watches Mel.

— The rocket passes over the harbor bridge.

— Mel looks at Jayce. He at her.

The rocket crashes through the window of the counsel chamber. SOUND OF EXPLOSION.

CUT TO BLACK.

THE ART and MAKING OF
ARCANE ARCANE ARCANE
I'LL BE RIGHT BACK...
SEE YA!

BORING
WATCH OUT
CRAZY
SMILE
LIAR
~~LOSER~~
CHAMP???
CUT!!
SIS
PUNCH
STOMPS
BOMBS
LOCO
FASTER
HURT